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Train attack

SUSPECTED *Islamist* militants opened fire on a train near the southern town of Luxor on Tuesday night injuring 10 Egyptians, said a source at the Ministry of Interior. The gunmen were hiding in sugar cane fields along the railway line near Farshut village, 600km south of Cairo.

Police on the train, which did not stop, returned fire but the militants escaped. The attack was the first on a train, once a favourite target of *Islamist* militants, since late April.

Bashir threat

SUDANESE President Omar Al-Bashir has declared a general mobilisation to stem the southern rebels' first offensive in four years. In a fiery speech at a rally in the province of Hasaheisa, southeast of Khartoum, on Tuesday, Bashir accused armies from neighbouring Uganda and Tanzania of taking part in the *offensive and threatened* to strike back into Ugandan territory.

Bashir ordered the Popular Defence Forces to expand exercises in their camps to include advanced training on rocket launchers, artillery and tanks. Since the start of their offensive on 25 October, the Sudan People's Liberation Army has captured nine towns and villages and, in retaliation, government warplanes have bombed a town in the south.

Libya appeal

LIBYA yesterday appealed to the families of the victims of the 1988 bombing of a PanAm flight over Lockerbie, Scotland, *to back an* Arab League proposal to try two Libyan suspects in The *Hague.*

In a quarter-page advertisement in the Wednes*day edition of The Washington Post*, Libya's mission to the UN urged the families to pressure their governments to accept a fair trial that would settle the present dispute, safeguard the rights of the victims' families and lift the sanctions imposed on the Libyan people. Both Washington and London have rejected the proposal.

Iraqi arms

THE HEAD of the UN team monitoring Iraqi weaponry, *Rolf Ekeus*, told *members of* the Security Council on Tuesday that Iraq had given UN *monitors* two draft declarations detailing its past biological and chemical weapons programmes.

A third report on Iraq's efforts to build long-range missiles is expected later this month. The twin declarations were not expected to stop the council from renewing international sanctions, imposed on Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait in 1990, this week. A UN official said Iraq had been developing a weapon before the *Gulf War* that would scatter deadly radioactive material from conventional *weapons.*

Jerusalem plan

THE PLO chief advisor on Jerusalem, Faisal Al-Husseini, said yesterday that he would present a report on the city to the Conference of Palestinian Businessmen, currently being held in Cairo under the auspices of the Arab League. The report deals with the consolidation *of the Palestinian presence* in the holy city in the face of Israeli measures to change *its character.*

INSIDE

Assassination fallout

Heads rolled and recriminations were exchanged, as a stunned Israel tried to discover what went wrong

In the aftermath of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, the Israeli government decided yesterday to set up a commission of inquiry into the prime minister's death. Meanwhile, some security heads began to roll. The director of the Shin Bet secret service's protection branch resigned. The head of Rabin's bodyguard unit *was suspended* and two other Shin Bet agents were transferred to other jobs, according to government sources.

The commission, with powers of subpoena, will investigate the security lapses that permitted the gunman to get near Rabin, as well as the Shin Bet's intelligence work on Jewish extremists. The gunman had links to the extremist fringe.

The cabinet, under Shimon Peres, decided to set up the commission of inquiry after a preliminary Shin Bet report on Rabin's assassination at a peace rally over the weekend.

The report said that bodyguards had failed to form a human shield around the 73-year-old prime minister and that unauthorised people had been allowed on the stairway to the terrace from which Rabin spoke and in the adjacent parking lot.

The head of the Shin Bet protection branch's resignation came in response to this report. In addition, the agent in charge of the prime minister's bodyguards was suspended, and two lower-ranking agents, one in charge of coordination with police and the other in charge of security at Saturday's rally, were to be shunted to other jobs, government sources said.

"The prime minister was abandoned in the field of battle by his bodyguards," commented a senior security official, who asked that his name be withheld.

The report suggested that the bodyguards, who work under the Shin Bet, may have been trained to act against Arab assailants and were inadequately prepared for attacks by Jews.

Israel army radio said yesterday that just before the rally, the Shin Bet had received fresh warnings that a Palestinian militant might try and kill Rabin.

According to state radio, the report also revealed that the cars *used by Rabin and his party were not kept far enough* away from the crowds or guarded, thus allowing killer Yigal Amir to pretend he was a driver and stay close to Rabin's car.

The Shin Bet report also found that the agency's database of Jewish extremists and possible attackers was too small and that it had failed to identify many of those who took part in violent anti-government demonstrations.

Amir, a 27-year-old law student, was not on police records and had a weapons permit although he was known to be a far-right activist. The bodyguards did not return his fire.

"*We have trained for this eventuality for 47 years [since Israel's* creation], and the day it happened, the whole system collapsed," said another security official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The last time a state commission of inquiry was set up was to prepare a report on the massacre of 29 Palestinians by a Jewish settler in the West Bank town of Hebron in February 1994.

Police are investigating the possibility that Amir, and his brother Hagai, 27, arrested as a suspected accomplice, were members of the anti-Arab Kahane Chai group.

Meanwhile, police arrested *a suspected extremist* for defending the assassination and wishing the same fate on Peres. A police spokesman said he was detained for questioning on Tuesday night in Beersheba, southern Israel. The *suspect was not named* but friends said he was David Ben Abraham, 44.

Ben Abraham, who is of French origin, said on Israeli television on Monday that he was happy at the death of "dictator Rabin" and wished the "same fate for the Nazi Arafat, and his friend Peres".

Police have stepped up protection for ministers after a rash of death threats from extreme right-wingers opposed to the peace process. Fresh graffiti on a wall in Jerusalem read: "Rabin was a victim of peace. Peres is next in line. Peres is continuing in the path of Hitler, the Nazi." The graffiti carried the logo of the anti-Arab Kach group, a clenched fist inside a Star of David.

The Amir family, meanwhile, begged forgiveness from Rabin's widow and the people of Israel. "A great calamity has befallen us and the people of Israel with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, may his memory be blessed, by our son," the family wrote in a letter to Leah Rabin which was read on Israel Radio on Wednesday.

"We ask the forgiveness of Mrs Rabin, her family and all of Israel," the letter said. Mrs Rabin said earlier that she would consider any such apology too little, too late.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Israelis continued to visit Rabin's grave on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem and mourn him at the Tel Aviv *square where he was killed. A mural of the slain leader was* painted on a wall above the square and at least 10,000 white memorial candles were lit at the site of the shooting. Graffiti scrawled on the walls said: "Rabin, we miss you" and "Rabin, you left us orphaned".

Rabin's violent death has spawned a wave of nostalgia for him and placed the right-wing opposition in a difficult position. Mrs Rabin accused Benyamin Netanyahu, head of the Likud Party, of tolerating incitement against her husband by extremists in his camp, whose virulent rhetoric labelling the prime minister a traitor and murderer may have encouraged the assassin.

Netanyahu maintained that he had opposed extremists and said that those blaming him were only sowing more discord and seek*ing to exploit the assassination for political gain.*

With anger at the rightist extremists strong, the new government of Peres took the first steps toward making it easier to prosecute militants for incitement.

After the seven-day mourning period, Peres is expected to form a new coalition cabinet and try to bring in additional partners, including, probably, religious factions. Rabin's coalition enjoyed only a one-vote majority in the 120-member parliament.

Palestinians are concerned that without Rabin's credibility as a former military leader, Peres on his own will have difficulty implementing the accord signed in September granting the Palestinians self-rule in much of the West Bank. Peres has promised that Israel's turmoil will not delay the planned Israeli troop pullout from six *West Bank towns by year's end. Palestinian* elections are to be held in January.



Bullet in the heart

Commentary:
George McGovern
Jerrold D Green
Lutfi El-Kholi
Salah Monatasser
Salama A. Salama
Tikva Honig-Parnass
Azmy Bishara
plus
in-depth coverage pp.4,5&11

Yemen to deport Islamist militants

Yemeni President Ali Abdallah Saleh, in an interview with **Ibrahim Nafie**, says Egypt has agreed in principle to conclude an extradition agreement with his government

The Yemeni government has decided to deport all Islamist militants who took refuge in its territory and is planning to conclude an extradition agreement with Egypt, President Ali Abdallah Saleh said in an interview with *Al-Ahram.*

Saleh, who backed Iraq during the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis, said he was in favour of inter-Arab reconciliation and expressed confidence that diplomatic *relations between Sanaa and Kuwait would be resumed* "some day".

Describing Egyptian-Yemeni relations as "distinguished", Saleh said: "Yemen has submitted to Egypt the draft of a security agreement calling for cooperation to serve the interests of the two countries. Our brothers in Egypt are still studying this draft but President Hosni Mubarak has approved it in principle and Egyptian officials are in favour of it. My understanding is that the agreement will be concluded during the next meeting of the joint [Egyptian-Yemeni] ministerial committee in Cairo."

Asked about reports that Yemen had requested Egypt to extradite Yemeni dissidents living in Cairo, Saleh replied: "This subject is still under study. All these matters will be regulated by the security agreement between the two countries."

Saleh said that the Yemeni government "has decided to deport all extremists who harm Yemen's interest and its relations with our Arab and Islamic brethren... All suspects have been deported. Yemen will not accept any of them on its territory, regardless of their nationalities. *They had entered the country at a time when the govern*ment was facing a crisis before the war of secession broke out. As I have just said, the government has decided to deport them to protect the security of the country as well as its relations with our brethren and friends... Any extremist who surfaces in Yemen, regardless of his nationality, whether he belongs to an Arab or Islamic state, will be deported."

A group of militants who have been arrested include an Algerian "who entered the country like any Arab citizen", Saleh said, noting that entry visas are not required for citizens of several Arab countries, including Algerians. "This man worked as a teacher in one of the provinces and then became involved in acts of provocation and riots in the province of Al-Daleh. As a result, he has been arrested along with a group of five Yemenis and put on trial." Saleh was unsure whether this Algerian had connections with 14 Egyptian militants jailed in Yemen at present.

However, he denied reports that Yemen had turned into a "transit station" for militants coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan and heading for Egypt, Sudan, Algeria and *Libya.*

Saleh distinguished between those who had merely taken part in the war of secession and those wanted for prosecution. The "dossier of the war of secession has been closed completely," he said, and a reconciliation forged with the secessionists. They have apologised, "and are now exercising full citizens' rights under a general amnesty".

The dossier that remains open, however, concerns those whom Yemen wants to prosecute for crimes: "While many [secessionists] have returned to the homeland, there is no doubt that those who continue to live abroad are traitors...and have branded themselves with treason. We have welcomed the return of all, except those whom we want to bring to justice for crimes they have committed."

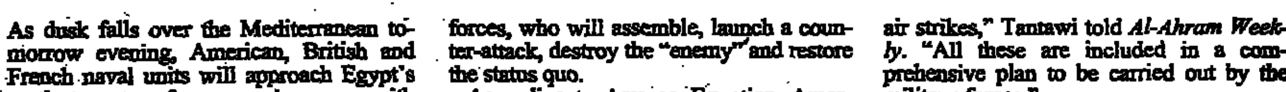
He added that 16 such suspects "will be given a fair trial, and we will respect the court's decision, whatever it may be".

On the question of the border problems between Yemen and its neighbours, Saleh said: "The border problem with the Sultanate of Oman has been solved. *The solution is satisfactory to the two sides. As to the* border problem with our brothers in Saudi Arabia, committees have been established to solve it and they are carrying out their task positively."

Saleh said Yemen was in favour of an inter-Arab reconciliation "but it seems that those who oppose the revival of Arab solidarity have succeeded in maintaining Arab divisions and marginalising the role of the Arab League. These nations took only their own interest into consideration, but we in Yemen have called, and continue to call, for the surmounting of differences and the revival of Arab solidarity. However, in order to achieve a reconciliation, we have to be outspoken and, consequently, we must sit down together and talk."

Biggest Bright Star ever

Egyptian and American troops are joining forces with other friendly nations to stage the biggest military exercise ever in the history of the Middle East. **Galal Nassar** reports



As dusk falls over the Mediterranean tomorrow evening, American, British and French naval units will approach Egypt's northern coast for a *rendez-vous* with Egyptian military vessels. A simulated all-night naval battle will begin, signalling the start of Bright Star-95 — the biggest military exercise ever staged in the Middle East. The eight-day war games will take place along the northern coast and further south in the western desert.

In addition to Egyptian and US forces, troops from *Britain, France and* the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will take part in Bright Star for the first time. The games will be watched by observers from eleven other countries — Germany, Italy, Turkey, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Morocco, Jordan and Pakistan.

The number of participating forces will amount to a record 56,413, including around 34,000 Egyptians and 21,500 Americans. The contributions of other participants will be smaller — 500 Frenchmen, 200 Britons and 160 troops from the UAE. Equally impressive will be the array of weaponry and equipment used. Around 795 warplanes and helicopters of various types, including the American F-16, the French Mirage 2000, the anti-tank Apache helicopter and C-130 transports, will take part, as well as warplanes from the aircraft-carrier USS America. Also in the field and waters of battle will be frigates, destroyers, submarines, landing craft, the advanced American M1-A2 battletank, and various types of missiles and artillery.



Field Marshal Tantawi (right) and Air General Nasr

The combatants will be divided into "orange" and "green" forces, operating under a joint command. The "orange" forces will attack the borders of the "green" state "with the aim of pillaging its resources," said Brig. Gen. Mohamed Ammar of the armed forces training department. In what appears to be a repeat of Desert Storm, the 1991 allied operation which drove the Iraqi invaders out of Kuwait, the "green" state will request the assistance of friendly forces, who will assemble, launch a counter-attack, destroy the "enemy" and restore the status quo.

According to Ammar, Egyptian, American and French forces will land along the northern coast on Saturday while British C-130 transports will take off from bases in Europe to drop troops further south. The following day, American and French craft will land three Egyptian mechanised infantry, tank and 155-mm artillery platoons along the coast.

After the troops take up their positions, Egyptian and French forces will attack the "enemy" flanks and centre on 14 November, while American marines, assisted by an Egyptian infantry platoon, will stage a diversionary offensive. Two Egyptian and American armoured brigades will later be thrown into battle for a head-on attack on the bulk of the "enemy" forces. After an "enemy" brigade is destroyed, Egyptian and British paratroopers, representing the "enemy", will be dropped behind the attacking forces to harass them. A reservist armoured division will join the fray to complete the destruction of "enemy" forces.

According to Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, planning Bright Star-95 began some time ago and the last touches were added during a visit he made to Washington last month. "Such exercises require thorough and joint planning to meet the specific demands of the participants, such as a coastal landing, the dropping of paratroopers, the storming of targets and the delivery of air strikes," Tantawi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "All these are included in a comprehensive plan to be carried out by the military forces."

Tantawi explained that Bright Star is held every two years, and that this year's exercise will be the biggest ever in the Middle East. "The participating states stand to benefit by gaining new experience, whether in the use of advanced weaponry or the deployment of forces," he said. Western military forces have shown an *interest* in joint training with Egyptian forces, he added, because of the latter's great experience in desert warfare.

Air force commander Lt. Gen. Ahmed Nasr said that out of a total of 795 warplanes and helicopters which will stage 2,662 sorties, Egypt will contribute 600 warplanes and helicopters, flying 1,502 sorties. "Whatever missions our air formations are assigned, whether by day or at night, will be carried out over seven successive days," Nasr said. "The result will be an impressive total of training hours. It is also the first time that our air force will work with air formations from four countries in a joint exercise."

In other "firsts," Egyptian-piloted anti-tank Apache helicopters will take part in a joint exercise and F-16 jetfighters will use infra-red optical equipment for a night-time attack on naval targets.

Twenty different types of warplanes and helicopters will participate in the war games, Nasr said. The United States will contribute 181 warplanes and helicopters that will fly 800 sorties, France eight warplanes for 200 sorties, Britain three C-130 transports for 20 sorties and the UAE three Apache helicopters for 90 sorties.

Foreign commentators, noting the large size of the participating forces and their advanced weaponry, and the fact that the participating countries were members of the US-led coalition that routed the Iraqi invaders, have stressed similarities between the war games and the 1991 Kuwait liberation war.

The biennial Bright Star series began after Egypt and Israel concluded a peace treaty in 1979. The next exercise, expected in *November 1997, will be even bigger.*

Assembly scramble

A record 4,109 candidates will compete for the 444 contested seats of the People's Assembly in the approaching general elections. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reviews the lists


photo: Muslim El-Sarouel

As elections approach, calligraphers are the only citizens who do not want to see an end to the campaigning. An opportunity to exercise their talent so profitably will not present itself soon: not for another four years

By the time candidate registration ended at 5 pm on Monday, the number of nominees contesting the 29 November elections had swelled to an unprecedented high — 4,278 compared to 2,681 in the last elections held in 1990. However, the number dropped to 4,109 after 160 applications were rejected and nine candidates reconsidered. The contestants will compete for 444 People's Assembly seats. President Hosni Mubarak has the constitutional authority to fill 10 other seats by appointment.

In the view of political analysts, the large number of candidates, representing various political parties as well as independents, indicates that the election battle will be exceptionally fierce, but not necessarily in all constituencies. The nation is divided into 222 constituencies. Each is represented in the Assembly by two deputies — one for *fe'at* [professionals] and the other for peasants and workers.

The last few hours of candidate registration were not devoid of surprises. Abdel-Nasser Taha Hussein Khalil, a cousin of the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser, filed papers to run as an independent in the Assiut constituency of Al Fat'h. And Hilmi El-Hadidi, a former minister of health, also decided to run as an independent in Al-Zarqa constituency in the governorate of Damietta.

El-Hadidi had occupied a seat in the 1979-1984 Assembly as a member of the Labour Party. In 1990 he ran as an independent and lost. But the Court of Cassation later ruled that the elections in his constituency were rigged in favour of his rival. The Assembly, however, refused to instate him and, as a result, was ordered by the court to pay him LE100,000 in compensation.

The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) has nominated the largest number of candidates — 439. Kamal El-Shazli, the NDP's assistant secretary-general, had said that 35 per cent of them were "new faces." But a careful scrutiny by political analysts showed that many of those "new faces" were in fact members of previous parliaments. They include Abul-Wafa Ali Ibrahim, Alexandria, Hamdi Qandil, Qalioubiya, and Mohieddin El-Qattan, Kafr El-Sheikh, who were members of the 1987-1990 Assembly. For one reason or another, the NDP decided to give them a chance to return to the limelight.

"Even if the list included new faces, this would not mean anything since NDP deputies are required to serve one purpose, which is to approve the government's new International Monetary Fund-inspired policies," said Wahid Abdel-Meguid, an expert at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Abdel-Meguid, who conducted a study on the structure of major political parties, said that any changes on the list were restricted to minor and insignificant constituencies. "Most, if not all, leading party members were nominated," he said.

The analysis of the NDP list of candidates also showed that it includes the chairmen of 14 committees of the outgoing Assembly. At least two of them have been members of parliament for over 15 years — Mohamed Abdellah, chairman of the foreign affairs committee, and Salah El-Tarouti, chairman of the tourism, information and culture committee.

The 14 chairmen stand a good chance of winning and, in this case, they are likely to remain at the head of the parliamentary committees — an indication that the leading roles in the coming Assembly will not change hands. The chairmen of two other parliamentary committees are usually appointed by the President.

Moreover, Ahmed Fathi Sorour, speaker of the outgoing Assembly, is most likely to keep the same post.

Political experts said there were also signs that the NDP and the Wafd Party were intent on avoiding a confrontation between their prominent members in some constituencies. The Wafd moved Mohamed Kamel, a millionaire businessman from Al-Bagour, the constituency of his formidable rival, Kamal El-Shazli, to Istanha. Both Al-Bagour and Istanha are in the Governorate of Al-Menoufiya.

Again, the NDP fielded a low-key candidate in the Cairo constituency of Qasr Al-Nil to run against Yassin Serageddin, brother of the Wafd's chairman, Fouad Serageddin. Similarly, the Wafd's candidate running against NDP Secretary-General Youssef Wali in the Fayoum constituency of Ibshway is a minor figure.

The analysts also said the Wafd refrained from running against key Muslim Brotherhood figures in the Cairo constituencies of Al-Darb Al-Ahmar, Al-Matariya and Boulaq and the Giza constituency of Al-Dokki. Altogether, the Wafd nominated 184 candidates, coming second after the NDP. They include 10 Copts and seven women.

The Islamist-oriented Labour Party did not publish a full list of its candidates but Nagi El-Shehabi, the party's assistant secretary-general, said they were around 120. They include one Copt — Gamal Asaad Abdel-Malek, who is running in the Cairo constituency of Shubra, and three women.

The outlawed Muslim Brotherhood earlier said it was fielding about 150 candidates. They do not include the Brotherhood figures who are standing trial at present before a military court. Some of whom had earlier announced their intention to run for election from behind bars but later reversed this decision.

The leftist Tagammu has nominated 42 candidates, including its chairman, Khaled Mohieddin, and deputy chairman, Lutfi Waked. The Democratic Nasserist Party fielded 44 candidates, including its chairman, Diaeddin Dawoud.

In another development, the NDP has begun taking action against some of its members who decided to run as independents after failing to secure a place on the party's official list. Mohieddin Abdel-Latif, secretary of the NDP's Cairo chapter, announced that 44 candidates were stripped of their NDP membership for running as independents in Cairo alone. "This decision was taken after the party's general-secretariat mandated its local chapters to expel members who are running independently," he said. Further action against other members should be expected, Abdel-Latif added.

Those expelled from NDP ranks include Hossam El-Badrawi, the owner of a private hospital running in Qasr Al-Nil, and Abdel-Hamid Hassan, former governor of Giza, running in Al-Manial in Cairo.

Campaign push comes to shove

Several incidents of election-related violence have been reported, but experts disagree on whether the phenomenon is new. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** investigates

With an unprecedentedly high number of candidates running for election on 29 November, fierce competition has erupted into violence in parts of the Nile Delta and Alexandria.

The worst outbreak was two weeks ago at the town of Toukh, just north of Cairo, and involved the supporters of Adel Sidki, the National Democratic Party (NDP) candidate and brother of Prime Minister Atef Sidki, and his independent rival Attiya El-Fayoumi. Firearms were used in the melée, in which one man was killed and several wounded.

In another shooting incident involving the supporters of two independent candidates in Alexandria — Mohamed El-Badrashini and Sabri Abdel-Sabbour — six people were injured and four cars were wrecked.

At the town of Ashmoun in Menoufiya Governorate, supporters of NDP candidate Ibrahim Maklad are alleged to have broken into the house of Zaki Abdel-Fattah, the Wafd Party candidate. Abdel-Fattah was wounded and his car was vandalised, along with some shops in the neighbourhood.

"The amount of violence and counter-violence we are witnessing in this election is unprecedented," said Ayman Nour, secretary of the Wafd Party, who is running for election in the Cairo constituency of Bab Al-Sha'riya. "Some candidates are ready to commit murder to get into parliament. They know now that it pays to be an MP."

Nour himself has been the target of a different kind of covert violence which, he said, has become part and parcel of the election process — sabotaging election posters and banners. "We call them election thugs because they run a protection racket," he said. "Unless you pay them, your banners will be torn down."

For Souad El-Sharkawi, a professor of constitutional law, there is nothing new in this phenomenon of violence, which, she maintains, has always been a feature of elections. She conceded, however, that the volume of violence might be higher this time and put the blame on the political parties. "Violence stems from the fact that the whole processes of election and election campaigning are disorganised. This is mainly because the political parties do not discharge their function of providing the public with a political education," she said.

Adel Sidki

And because the number of candidates has set an all-time record, the aggressive competition between them was bound to be coupled with an increase in violence. The Penal Code includes enough guarantees for an election that is free of violence but, because it is rarely invoked, it does not provide an adequate deterrent, El-Sharkawi said. And, she added, "When we talk about a political phenomenon like the elections, we cannot expect the law to provide all the required solutions."

Some sociologists believe that the election violence is part of a wider circle of violence and counter-violence that broke out with the upsurge of militant Islamism several years ago. "In 1987, we witnessed the beginning of violence," commented Ahmed El-Magdoub of the National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Research. "This year's election comes at a time when the country has been through hard times, and the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence remains unbroken in Upper Egypt.

"The political climate and the refusal to tolerate the other's point of view have brought to the political scene a generation of politicians who are not willing to make sensible arguments and provide a good political agenda. Instead they rely on money and muscle in areas with high rates of illiteracy."

Rivalry is fierce in Helwan, Dokki and Nasr City, as government officials, Islamists and other opposition figures battle it out. **Amira Howeidy** investigates

Helwan fumes

A huge pall of dust, spewing from the chimneys of cement factories, hangs over Helwan, an industrial suburb 30km south of Cairo. But the eye cannot miss the giant wooden scaffolding spanning the streets, on which two cabinet ministers, as well as other candidates, have hoisted the posters and banners of their election campaign.

Helwan is divided into two separate constituencies. Mohamed El-Ghamrawi, minister of state for military production, is running in the first constituency — where several military factories are located. Mohamed Ali Mahgoub, minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) and a member of parliament for the past 16 years, is running in the second.

Ghamrawi's most formidable foe appears to be Abul-Ela Madi, a 37-year-old member of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and assistant secretary-general of the Engineers' Syndicate. Madi, who is contesting elections for the first time, chose to run in Helwan because, he claimed, the Islamist trend has many supporters there. He is campaigning under the Brotherhood's slogan, "Islam is the solution".

In 1987, Gamal El-Sayed, then minister of military production, was defeated by another Islamist, Sheikh Youssef El-Badri. To avoid a repeat of this defeat, Madi claimed, all workers from military factories throughout Egypt have been registered as voters in Helwan. According to Madi, this is why El-Sayed carried the constituency in the 1990 elections.

Nevertheless, Madi sounded confident that he would win, although he complained of "unfair competition, and the spending of thousands of pounds". Madi has put up 40 sets of wooden scaffolding, compared to 1,200 for Ghamrawi.

But a source in Ghamrawi's office pointed out that all National Democratic Party candidates have the financial support of the ruling party. "This is common knowledge, but what about the others, the Islamists, where do they get their money from?"

Mahgoub also alleged that some of his rivals received financial support "from outside" which could influence the outcome of the election battle. One of Mahgoub's rivals is Mustafa Bakri, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Al-Ahrar*, mouthpiece of the Liberal Party. The Liberals used to be members of an "Islamic alliance" that also included the Labour Party and the Muslim Brotherhood, but it is an open question whether this coalition is still alive.

Bakri's brother edits a local weekly newspaper, *Voice of Helwan*, which claims a circulation of 30,000. For the past six months, it has been campaigning against Mahgoub, accusing him of corruption.

Although Bakri complained of his inability to compete with Mahgoub's financial resources, he has organised numerous rallies in Helwan during the past two months. One of which was attended by Gen. (retr'd) Mohamed Fawzi, defence minister under the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser, and Nasser's son, Khaled.

With the cement dust taking its toll on Helwan's inhabitants, fighting environmental pollution is the focal point of most candidates' campaigns. Many depend on family and provincial loyalties. Bakri, who hails from the southern province of Qena, is confident that he will be supported by those Helwan residents who have their origins in Upper Egypt.

Others depend on the support of workers. One of them is Mustafa Abdel-Ghaffar, a worker himself, who is campaigning under the slogan "the voice of Helwan's workers". Abdel-Ghaffar, who was arrested during the 1989 industrial riots, has gained wide popularity with fellow workers as a defender of their rights.

"Thousands of workers who live here are threatened by the government's policy of privatisation," Abdel-Ghaffar said. "Hundreds of families may also become homeless if the state decides to dismantle the shanty towns where they live. These are some of the problems facing the deprived area of Helwan. I want the People's Assembly to take these people into consideration."

In the cool of the night, candidates organise marches by their supporters, which have remained peaceful to date. "I am surprised that the security forces have not intervened so far," Bakri said.

'Sword of Islam'

The Giza constituency of Al-Dokki has come to be known as the "constituency of contradictions". Although largely an upper middle class area, it also includes working-class neighbourhoods and shanty towns such as Awlad Allam and Deir Al-Nahia. The 15 parliamentary candidates have had to adapt accordingly: the language and approach likely to appeal to voters in chic Feeny Square would not go down so well in the working class neighbourhood of Mit Oqba.

Thousands of banners are hanging across the streets, promoting the different candidates. And, for illiterate voters, the election law stipulates that each candidate be allocated a different symbol to identify him, or her, on the ballot card. One of Dokki's two front-runners, Minister of Social Affairs Amal Osman, has been given the crescent moon as her electoral symbol. Her arch-rival, Muslim Brotherhood member Maamoun El-Hodeibi, campaigning under his group's "Islam is the solution" slogan, has been given the sword. The joke doing the rounds of coffee shops in the area is that Hodeibi is contesting the election with his "sword of Islam".

With banners carrying Osman's name hanging over almost every street and square in both the affluent and deprived sections of the constituency, Hodeibi complained of what he described as "unfair" competition.

However, observers believe he has a fair chance of winning. He has roots in the area. Ibn Al-Walid Square, a well-known area of Dokki, is practically owned by the Hodeibi family, which has been living there for the past 30 years. The family property includes three tall buildings as well as several shops around the square. Hodeibi is also relying on Brotherhood support in some of Dokki's working-class neighbourhoods such as Bayn Al-Sarayat and Mit Oqba.

For the past 10 days, Hodeibi has been taking long walks with some of his supporters in those neighbourhoods. "I don't have an electoral programme," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "All I have to say to the people is that Islam is the solution and that I promise to be honest with them."

And while the basic message remains the same, Hodeibi acknowledged that he has to tailor his words to his audience. "There are two types of people in Dokki, those to whom I can make political statements, and the others, the masses, who have to be addressed differently, and in a less sophisticated way," he said.

Osman's campaign seems to be run on more organised lines. She has made repeated visits to densely populated areas, including one incorporating a Coca-Cola bottling plant, where she has been assured of the 2,000 votes of its workers, according to one of her aides. She has also visited the Scientific Research Centre and the National Centre for Social and Criminological Research, which together employ about 3,000 people, the aide said.

In past elections, Dokki managed only a meagre turnout of voters. But with this year's fierce rivalry between candidates, a larger number of residents are predicted to head for the polling stations on 29 November.

Sporting campaign

Many sports facilities, including Cairo Stadium, are located in Nasr City. It was only natural, therefore, for Abdel-Moneim Emara, chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, to run for election there. Emara, a cabinet minister without portfolio, is confident of winning the youth vote. He calls Nasr City, which has 64,000 registered voters, a "youth constituency".

Emara's strongest rivals are Essam El-Fayoumi, a millionaire businessman and Adel Hussein, secretary-general of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party. Hussein is running for election for the first time and, like other Islamists, is campaigning under the slogan "Islam is the solution".

And like other constituencies throughout the country, Nasr City has been flooded with banners hanging across the streets. But Hussein's are different. Blue in colour, with the writing in white, they announce that "Islam is the nation's demand" and caution voters that abstention from voting is sinful.

Hussein has been actively campaigning for over a month. He has visited local factories and toured the markets, talking to shoppers and shop-owners. But nevertheless his chances do not appear to be as good as Emara's or El-Fayoumi's.

El-Fayoumi owns a kebab restaurant in the eighth district of Nasr City, which has been providing free meals for nearly two months. Like Emara, he has put up an impressive number of banners, and it is alleged that he has spent as much as LE2 million on his campaign.

Meanwhile, Emara is reported to have registered 15,000 voters in Nasr City who are not residents of the constituency. As a result, the newspaper *Al-Wafd*, mouthpiece of the opposition Wafd Party, accused Emara of electoral fraud. Emara, who reacted by filing a libel suit against the newspaper, said he did it in order to encourage young people to engage in civic action.

In statements published in *Al-Ahram* on Monday, Emara said: "I had promised to revive young people's interest in civic action through student unions and local councils. Why should I deprive them of the opportunity of electing members of the People's Assembly? This is not an accusation. If I could have found half a million young people to participate in electing their representatives, I would have done it."

Emara added that the 15,000 voters whom he had registered in Nasr City "are not enough to ensure success in a constituency with a total of 64,000 registered voters".

As part of his campaign, Emara held a public rally last month at the Nasr City Youth Centre. It is also rumoured that the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, which he heads, has donated large amounts of money to the sports committees of trade unions based in Nasr City.

The local secretary of the Labour Party in Nasr City has reacted by filing a lawsuit with an administrative court, contesting Emara's nomination.



Militants strike again in Al-Minya

The killing of five police officers and men in Al-Minya this week, most likely by Islamist militants, was a grim reminder that violence is not about to die out in this southern Egyptian governorate. **Dina Ezzat** reports

In two separate incidents of violence in the southern Governorate of Al-Minya this week, Islamist militants opened fire at police patrols, killing at least five police officers and men and wounding four others. Both attacks took place around the town of Mallawi, an Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya hotbed, where militants have been waging a campaign of violence against police and civilians for the past 15 months. The police were attacked as they were on their way to raid reported militant hideouts. In both cases, the assailants escaped.

Security forces rounded up a large number of suspects throughout the governorate. "It is true that the assailants managed to escape from the scene of the attacks but, within less than 24 hours, we managed to capture a number of suspects and we are pretty confident that at least three of them were somehow involved in these attacks," Maj. Gen. Sami Abdel-Gawad, Al-Minya's security chief, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview.

Abdel-Gawad, who assumed his post barely six weeks ago, refused to provide further information on the number of arrests. But sources in Mallawi put the figure at "a few hundred, if not a thousand". Abdel-Gawad said the number was not so high.

Conceding that the victims included senior police officers specifically targeted by the militants, Abdel-Gawad said: "As long as the police continue to pursue and arrest these criminals, they will always try to get back at us. It should be expected that there will be some confrontations, but we will always be in control."

However, the security chief's confidence was not shared by some local residents. Reached by telephone from Cairo, they expressed concern that the latest upsurge could indicate that the situation was becoming critical again and that even harder times were ahead.

"The situation seems grim," said a resident of Mallawi, who asked that his name be withheld. He spoke of "harsh times during the past year since the militants shifted their anti-state activity from Assiut to Al-Minya". According to him and other residents, a night-time curfew imposed on Mallawi and at least five other villages "has had a severe impact on people's lives".

Slow trading, increasing unemployment and a paralysed social life have been the immediate side-effects of the "seemingly unending state of tension".

Maj. Gen. Abdel-Gawad affirmed that "the curfews are not going to be lifted before we are 100 per cent confident that the situation is safe for civilians."

Although residents put the blame squarely on the militants for turning the governorate into a theatre of war in their campaign against the government, they also complained that the performance of security forces was occasionally "clumsy". "Members of the militant political movements are certainly guilty of violence, but the reaction of security forces has not been the best," said Fathallah Khafagah, secretary of the Nasserist Party's provincial chapter. "Harsh security measures, random arrests and police harassment of civilians are not the way out of the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence," he said.

Meanwhile, the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) expressed serious concern about the latest flare-ups. "The EOHR has repeatedly warned that the escalation of violence will lead to inevitable violations of basic human rights in Egypt, including the right to life and personal safety," stated a report issued this week by the human rights group.

The report said the EOHR "holds the militant violent groups responsible for most of the violence" witnessed in the governorate recently. But it also demanded that the government should "reconsider its security measures in dealing with the militant groups" and "demonstrate dedication to the spirit and letter of the constitution, and to human rights.

"The EOHR reaffirms that the violent militant groups can only be confronted by encouraging civil society to play its full role," the report said.

Islamist students march

IN ONE of the biggest student demonstrations in several years, hundreds of Cairo University students staged a "freedom march" on campus on Sunday, reports **Rana Allam**.

The majority of the demonstrators were Islamists — bearded young men and veiled young women — and their main concern appeared to be the student union elections from which 84 candidates, mainly Islamists, have been barred.

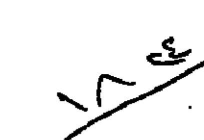
According to Fahima El-Assal, an official at the Faculty of Commerce, the candidates were barred by Cairo University President Moufid Shehab on the grounds that they had not taken part in any student activities, a precondition for election to a union post.

However, as a result of a court order, many of their names have been put back on the candidates' lists and a second round of voting was scheduled for yesterday at seven faculties.

As truckloads of security forces surrounded the university on Sunday, the demonstrators shouted slogans demanding free student union elections, and free parliamentary elections. They also carried placards, in Arabic and English, protesting the military trial of a group of Muslim Brotherhood figures. One placard proclaimed that "Islam is the solution" — the Brotherhood's slogan.

All roads leading to the university were blocked and ambulances and fire engines were positioned nearby. However, the march ended peacefully and no clashes were reported between the students and the security forces.

"The student unions are a smaller version of the People's Assembly," an Islamist woman student said. "If we do not fight now for free union elections, we will not be able to fight later for free parliamentary elections."



Nasserism, 90s style

In a continuing series on the political parties that will contest the approaching general elections, **Amira Ibrahim** and **Jailan Halawi** review the Nasserists' efforts to establish their own party, analyse divisions in party ranks, interview its leader Diaeddin Dawoud and sound out experts on the party's performance

From 1984 until 1992, Nasserist figures were involved in protracted legal battles to set up a political party that would keep alive the ideology of the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser — socialism, Arab unity, non-alignment and an anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist stance.

One of those legal battles was led by Kamal Ahmed, who sought to establish a so-called Alliance of the People's Working Forces. Farid Abdel-Karim, a former high official of Nasser's Arab Socialist Union, spearheaded another battle, for the establishment of a 'Nasserist Arab Socialist Party'. Both Ahmed and Abdel-Karim were turned down by the Political Parties Committee — a semi-governmental body responsible for licensing new political parties — as well as the Political Parties Tribunal and other administrative courts to which they took their case.

In 1990, Diaeddin Dawoud, a cabinet minister and a high ASU official under Nasser, was mandated by the would-be founders of the Nasserist Arab Socialist Party to file a fresh application under a new name — the Arab Democratic Nasserist Party. Again the application was turned down by the Political Parties Committee.

Dawoud took the case to the Political Parties Tribunal which ruled in his favour in April 1992.

A party congress was convened and elected Dawoud as party chairman. But Dawoud found himself embroiled in a power struggle with Abdel-Karim, who, charging that the party elections had been rigged, convened another party congress, which dismissed Dawoud from the party's leadership and elected Abdel-Karim in his place. However, the latter's opposition was ineffectual and Dawoud remained the recognised party leader.

The Nasserist Party is also torn by divisions among three generations of its members. The first, known as the May group, includes figures who held leading political and military posts during Nasser's era. They were all put on trial by Sadat in May 1971 and spent between three and 10 years in prison.

The second is the middle generation, which is made up of rank-and-file members of the Arab Socialist Union and its Youth Organisation. The third group is made up of younger people who campaigned for Nasserism as students in the 1970s, and occasionally won control of student unions. Universities continue to supply this group with new recruits.

The younger generation has a negative view of senior party members, while the old guard believes that the younger generation lacks political experience.

"We fought a fierce battle against Sadat, interacting with people in the streets, while they [the old guard] were in prison or exile," said Hamdin Sabahi, a member of the party's political bureau. "What did they do for the movement? Their only qualification is that they were state employees under Nasser, but this doesn't give them legitimacy."

Amin Iskandar, the party's secretary for cultural affairs, added: "I believe it is time for all those declining figures to disappear, leaving the stage for the younger generation."

For his part, Dawoud said: "I don't blame these young people for being ambitious. I only ask them to take a step-by-step approach." And, reasoned Mohamed Fawzi, a former defence minister under Nasser, "We did not prevent anyone from running for election to these high posts, did we?"

Nevertheless, Abdel-Karim believes that the leadership of the party is its weak point. In his view, "There is a need for a strong figure to take over the party leadership."

Although Nasser outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood and sent thousands of its members to jail, some Nasserists, including Abdel-Karim, now advocate closer ties with the Islamists. "Nasser's heritage was not built at the expense of Islam and it does not contradict its teachings," he argued.

For Hamdin Sabahi, Nasserists and Islamists have four areas of agreement. "Both are opposed to American hegemony, Zionism and government corruption and both call for greater freedoms," he said. "As for their differences, they can be dealt with." Dawoud, however, is opposed to cooperation with the Islamists.

The Nasserist Party opposed the re-election of President Hosni Mubarak for a third term in the 1993 national referendum. The party also boycotted last year's National Dialogue Conference because it was chaired by Mustafa Khalil who, as prime minister under Sadat, was one of the architects of the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. The party remains strongly opposed to normalising relations with Israel.

Platform

The party advocates self-reliance in economic development, a central role for the state, with society maintaining control over resources. Politically, the party is a strong champion of Arab unity and non-alignment. Egypt should not be subservient to any foreign power but should maintain independence.

The party's platform also rejects what it calls 'American hegemony' over the United Nations and recommends that ways of fighting this hegemony should be sought.

It emphasises Egypt's leading role in the Arab-African-Islamic sphere and urges opposition to what it calls the hegemony of the oil-rich countries on the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

The platform describes the Arab-Israeli conflict as a conflict between the Arab people, on the one hand, and Zionism and American imperialism, on the other.

Membership

According to party sources, membership stood at around 50,000, when the party was first established in 1992, but swelled to 150,000 in the space of a few months. At present, they claim a membership of around 200,000.

Funding

According to the Central Auditing Agency, the party is one of the most affluent, financing its activity by interest accruing from an LE1.85 million bank deposit. The money is registered as loans from top party officials such as Hamed Mahmoud (LE500,000), Mohamed Fayeq (LE350,000), and Dawoud (LE100,000).

To this should be added an annual LE100,000 subsidy from the *Shura* Council, membership fees and the LE1,000 paid annually by each Nasserist member of the People's Assembly.

Capital perspectives

Barely two years old, the Nasserists' mouthpiece, the weekly *Al-Arabi*, is Egypt's youngest opposition newspaper. Now appearing on a twice-weekly basis in the run-up to the forthcoming elections, the newspaper had a modest start, employing a group of young reporters, some of them part-timers, and others who were Nasserists with no previous journalistic experience.

And yet its editor-in-chief, Mahmoud El-Maraghi, claims a circulation ranking second among opposition newspapers. Although he refused to provide details, other sources maintain that circulation stands at around 40,000, a figure which rises on Nasserist anniversaries.

Since the newspaper's establishment, its staff and sources of funding have changed dramatically. Nowadays the majority of reporters are not party members, and, whereas party donors provided most of the money at first, the paper is now largely self-financing, with 80-90 per cent of expenditure covered by advertisements and circulation, El-Maraghi claims.

According to Dr Awatef Abdel-Rahman, a professor of journalism at Cairo University, one of the the newspaper's flaws is that it devotes regular columns to party leaders, at the expense of giving a voice to the younger generation, which, in her view, is better able to serve the party's interests.

"I believe the newspaper still has a long way to go," Abdel-Rahman said. "Although it has a good editor-in-chief, the staff do not work well together; they do not make a team capable of putting out a party mouthpiece."

Another problem with the newspaper, Abdel-Rahman continued, is that it focuses on events in the capital, giving little attention to the provinces and shanty towns. "As a newspaper addressing Nasser's followers, it should give more space to the people's problems. There will be an erosion of the newspaper's quality if it continues to take the shape of a party newsletter," she added.

According to El-Maraghi, the newspaper carries Egyptian and Arab news, but has little interest in international events. "We deal with the Egyptian and Arab situations from a specific perspective," he said, while insisting that, "This perspective is not copied from the past — what happened in the 1960s cannot be repeated in the '90s." However he stressed that Nasserist fundamentals such as social equality, national independence and Arab nationalism were always upheld.

"We reject US domination of our decision-making," he explained. "But although we reject subservience to the US and the International Monetary Fund, we are not against cooperation. We may agree or disagree with the government but we still believe that it should play a role in directing our economy." Much of *Al-Arabi's* coverage, El-Maraghi said, is devoted to exposing corruption in government circles and opposing the normalisation of relations with Israel.

Like other opposition newspaper editors, he complained that his reporters do not have sufficient access to information; they are not allowed into the Office of the Presidency, the prime minister's office or the Foreign Ministry. "Even in places where we are allowed to have representatives, reporters from national newspapers have a greater chance of obtaining information," he said.

Moreover, he alleged, the state turns a deaf ear to the material published in *Al-Arabi*. "We write, with evidence, about specific cases of corruption, but no one bothers to reply to our allegations. There is a state trend to hold public opinion in contempt."

But he was quick to distance the Nasserist newspaper from some other opposition publications. "What distinguishes *Al-Arabi* from other newspapers," El-Maraghi said, "is that we are extremely objective in what we publish. We differ with the president, but we do not attack him personally. We do not get involved in verbal sparring."

The Nasserist old guard is divided between militants and moderates. Neither seems to appeal to "the '70s generation"

Orthodoxy with a twist

Farid Abdel-Karim, 65, is a former high official of the Arab Socialist Union who, in the 1980s, led one of three legal battles for the establishment of a Nasserist party. He advocated the formation of a party under the name of the Nasserist Arab Socialist Party. But it was Diaeddin Dawoud who successfully won a court order sanctioning the establishment of the Arab Democratic Nasserist Party.

Abdel-Karim and members of his fledgling Arab Socialist party joined Dawoud's party, but a fierce power struggle ensued, with Abdel-Karim's supporters insisting he was the rightful leader of the Nasserist movement in the country.

"I am certain to win 90 per cent of the vote in the coming party elections," said Abdel-Karim. "But I believe it is time now for the younger generation to take over."

Born in 1930, Abdel-Karim graduated from Cairo University's Faculty of Law in 1952 and worked as a lawyer. He began his political career in 1966 as the local secretary of the Arab Socialist Union in the Giza district of Dokki. Two years later, he became a member of the ASU's national congress and was later elected to membership of the ASU's Central Committee. In 1971 he and a group of other Nasser-aides were accused by President Anwar El-Sadat of conspiring to overthrow him. He was sentenced to death but Sadat later reduced the sentence to 25 years imprisonment. He was released in 1981 but re-arrested two months later, finally regaining his freedom in 1982.

Among the old guard Nasserists, Abdel-Karim is recognised as the most militant. His more orthodox brand of Nasserism witnessed a significant development in recent years however, as he began to advocate a Nasserist/Islamist alliance.

Despite past hostility between Nasserists and Islamists, Abdel-Karim believes that cooperation between the two groups is now possible. There are, he says, some Islamist leaders who acknowledge Nasserist precepts concerning Arab, Islamic and human issues, adding: "There is no doubt that Islam advocates social justice, a Nasserist principle."

In addition to his law practice, Abdel-Karim delivers lectures in Arab countries, rejecting normalisation of relations with Israel and "Middle Easternism", as opposed to Arabism. He describes the former as treason and "the crime of the age".

A touch of moderation

Mohamed Fayeq, 66, is a member of the political bureau of the Arab Democratic Nasserist Party and secretary-general of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights (AOHR). He is widely recognised as representing the moderate face of Nasserism, while his focus on human rights seems to underline his belief in the necessity of a renewal of Nasserism, whichhas been associated with authoritarianism. He is criticised by both the Party's militant youth and the more orthodox old-guard as advocating a tame brand of Nasserism that has lost its revolutionary edge.

Born in the Nile Delta town of Mansoura, Fayeq graduated from the Military Academy in 1948 and joined the Artillery Corps. On the eve of 23 July 1952, he took part in the revolutionary officers' siege of the Abdin Palace, which, three days later, led to the overthrow of King Farouk.

In 1955, Fayeq began a political career when he was appointed director of the African Affairs Department at the Presidency of the Republic. His eight-year occupancy of this post was interrupted in 1956 when he fought in the Suez War as an artillery officer.

Since 1963, Fayeq has represented Egypt at a number of international gatherings, including the UN General Assembly, and served as President Nasser's personal envoy to East and West African countries. At home, Fayeq held the posts of information minister in three cabinets, as well as minister of state for foreign affairs, and has been a member of the People's Assembly.

In May 1971, Fayeq resigned his post as information minister shortly before the late President Anwar Sadat ordered his arrest, along with other top Nasser aides, in what Sadat described as his "corrective revolution". They were accused of planning to overthrow the government. Fayeq was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment and released in 1981.

Fayeq, who now runs a publishing house, has frozen his membership of the Nasserist Party's political bureau in order to devote more time and effort to his human rights work, and so that the public will not confuse the objectives of the party with those of the AOHR.

"Human rights work is not a party activity, although it should be at the top of all the parties' agendas," he says. Fayeq has held the post of AOHR secretary-general since 1987.

The graduate

Hamdin El-Sabahi, a member of the Nasserist party's political bureau, is a representative of the younger generation of Nasserists who became active in the student movement of the early '70s. Before obtaining a degree in mass communications, he was part of a group which established the Nasserist Thought Club at Cairo University in 1974. He was head of the Cairo University Student Union in 1975-76 and deputy chairman of the General Federation of Students in 1975-1977.

Following the food riots of January 1977, Sabahi publicly opposed President Anwar El-Sadat at a televised meeting between the president and the General Federation of Students. As a result, he was banned from working in the national press.

Sabahi was arrested on numerous occasions for his political activities. He was the youngest member of a group of national political figures, from various ideologies, whom Sadat sent to jail in September 1981, one month before his assassination. The last time he was arrested was in 1991, when he spoke before Cairo University students demonstrating against the American-led war against Iraq, following its occupation of Kuwait.

He is a strong believer in the necessity of building up a national front to oppose what he calls "American hegemony and the policy of surrendering to the Zionist enemy". He took part in setting up committees of solidarity with the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples and opposing normalisation of relations with Israel.

A member of the Press Syndicate and the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR), Sabahi is director of the Arab Homeland Information Office. He is running for election in his native constituency of Al-Borollos in the northern Delta.

Independent analysts, interviewed by the *Weekly*, find Nasserists, like their arch-foes the Wafdists, steeped in nostalgia

Unfinished business

I believe the Nasserists' chances in the coming elections are very slim, but I don't wish to underestimate them. It is too early to judge the performance of the party, since it is the newest on the domestic political scene. But the fact that it only nominated a small number of candidates indicates that it has not yet finished its political preparations.

The future success of the party will depend on its ability to unite all the Nasserist currents in society, thus turning the party into a grassroots movement. If the party leadership succeeds in uniting these currents into one group, it will be one of the most important and efficient on the domestic political scene.

What is promising is that there is a large number of politically cultured young people inside the party who have a good understanding of the prevailing conditions and who can provide new ideas.

In order to succeed, the Nasserist Party should take two important facts into account. The first is that the domestic, regional and international conditions that accounted for the emergence of Nasserism have changed completely and that a repeat of the golden Nasserist era of the 1960s is impossible. The second is that it has become imperative to build up Nasserism without Abdel-Nasser and without the Nasserists being in power. However, if the party fails in this task, this will not mean the demise of Nasserist ideology.



Hassan Nafaa
Professor of political science, Cairo University

Packaged nostalgia

The fact that the Nasserist Party could not nominate more than 42 candidates in the upcoming elections indicates a lack of grassroots support. Moreover, its newspapers' circulation is no more than 40,000. Therefore, we should not expect the party to win more than four or five seats in the new People's Assembly, and those seats will be won by candidates who have social, rather than political, support.

The limited political space within which the party is active is partly due to the fact that it is a new party, partly because it represents the Nasserist "old guard", and partly because of internal divisions.

The party is not a true representative of the Nasserist sentiment in this country, which is much larger than the party's scope. The party's platform is inconsistent. While showing a readiness to participate in development programmes, it centralises economic power in the government's hands.

The platform also fails to take into account many of the changes which have taken place in Egypt, the region and the world. It advocates the dominance of the public sector, at a time when all the world is privatising.

What the party should have offered is Nasserism 1995-style. But instead the Nasserists talk with nostalgia about something which they believe can work at all times, as if it were a religion. Politics means the ability of ideologies to adjust to changes.

And yet, the party can still have a future because there is widespread sentiment in favour of national independence, social justice and the link between Egypt and the rest of the Arab world. The Nasserist package continues to be influential in this country.

Abdel-Moneim Said
Director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies



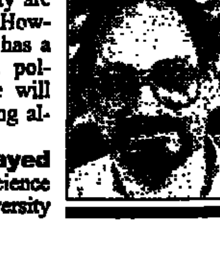
Desperately seeking Nasser

Although the Nasserist Party takes a nationalist stance on domestic and foreign policy issues, and although it is influential among intellectuals, it has not yet managed to raise grassroots support. I doubt that it has reached down to the peasants and workers, but this is difficult to judge because it has not contested elections before.

This lack of support may be due to restrictions on the activities of political parties, but it is also due to the fact that although many people are aware of what the party is against, few of them know what it stands for. It has not offered detailed alternatives to many policies of the National Democratic Party government, both domestic and foreign, which it rejects.

The new realities in the Middle East and the world make it necessary for the party to adapt its discourse, methods of action and platform, without necessarily abandoning its principal goals. Another point of weakness is the party's internal divisions and infighting. Party members are always dreaming of a charismatic leader like Nasser, which blinds them to the necessity of establishing strong new cadres.

Although nearly 25 years have passed since Nasser's death, people are nostalgic for his days, when national dignity was of paramount importance. But I believe that large sections of society are not aware of the party's existence. However, I also believe that the party has a future, because many government policies are unpopular. Many people will find the Nasserist Party an appealing alternative.



Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed
Professor of political science
Cairo University

Message from the past — updated

Diaeddin Dawoud, leader of the Arab Democratic Nasserist Party, began a legal practice after graduating from Cairo University's Faculty of Law in 1949. He was elected a member of the People's Assembly in 1964 and, four years later, was appointed as minister of social affairs in a cabinet headed by President Gamal Abdel-Nasser.

He held the post for only seven months, but in October 1968 he became a member of the Higher Executive Committee, or collective leadership, of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), the sole political party at the time. He was re-elected to the People's Assembly in 1969 and, a year later, became a member of the ASU general-secretariat.

After Nasser's death and President Anwar El-Sadat's rise to power, Dawoud was arrested along with a group of top Nasser aides, put on trial on charges of conspiring to overthrow the regime, and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

He was released in 1981 but it was only in 1987 that he was allowed to become politically active again by the order of the Supreme Constitutional Court. Dawoud fought a long legal battle until an administrative court approved the establishment of the Nasserist Party in 1992. In the same year, he was elected by a general party congress as the party's leader.

The Nasserists are contesting parliamentary elections as a political party for the first time. How do you rate the party's chances?

The Nasserist Party is certainly a competitive party with a distinct ideological and political message — Nasser's ideas updated. It has experienced and skilled cadres and a large following, strongly loyal to the party's principles. We are qualified to discharge our share of responsibility, but are we allowed to?

For the past five years, since the outgoing People's Assembly first convened, we have been urging a modification of election procedures, as the present system discourages qualified people from nominating themselves, but the government did not respond. As the situation remains unchanged, opposition candidates take a big risk by contesting elections; they accept they will have to enter battles, some of which are bloody, some costly, and all to no avail.

The National Democratic Party (NDP) has a firm hold on power, claiming to be the representative of the majority, although it does little to meet the wishes of that majority. So, the incumbent government is also the future government. It is a government for all seasons.

The party is often accused of being a prisoner of Nasserist ideology, falling back on what Nasser would have said or done in a given situation. How true is this?

There is no school of thought that does not refer to its origins: Marxists refer to Marx and Lenin, capitalists refer to their philosophers and religionists to their holy books. Speaking objectively, Nasser did not invent anything new. He moulded the applicable precepts of already-existing ideologies and put them to melt in the crucible of the July Revolution.

As a party, we are dealing with the status quo, which does not differ much from the situation that existed before the revolution. In the pre-revolution era, we did not have strong relations with the Arab states, foreign powers were dominant, the economy was capitalist, Egypt had no independent will and poverty was rampant.

The situation now is not very much different. Egyptian national will is chained by heavy debts which have placed us at the mercy of the Paris Club [of creditors] and the International Monetary Fund. We agreed to cooperate with Israel, thus allowing it to take on the Arab countries one by one. The Arab League has reached an unprecedented point of weakness and the Arab countries are divided into axes, one in the Gulf and another in north-west Africa.

Faced with this situation, we have to refer to Nasser's approach, which proved successful and had many positive aspects. Referring to this approach is in no way reactionary because we believe that Nasser's thoughts can be developed to deal with the present.

It has been said that Nasserism had a greater impact before the establishment of the party, whose achievements do not live up to Nasser's name. What do you think?

As I just said, the ruling NDP has a tight control on power. As an opposition party, we are denied access to the media, which is monopolised by the NDP and the government. The so-called national newspapers and magazines, even the foreign-language newspapers, are in fact pro-government. Most opposition parties only have a weekly mouthpiece, and this is not enough. A rotation of power appears impossible.

Moreover, the political parties' law includes many restrictions on organisation and funding. According to this law, public meetings of any party must be held indoors. The NDP, which took over the headquarters and offices of the Arab Socialist Union, could do this easily. But we had to look for six months for a place that could accommodate 250 people in order to hold the meetings of our central committee.

The law prohibits parties from accepting donations in private, either from individuals or groups. If we receive a grant of LE500, for instance, we are obliged to make an announcement in a daily newspaper, which costs us LE200.

Political parties also come under the supervision of the Central Auditing Agency, which deals with them as profit-making companies. But our newly-established party, which relies exclusively on members' subscriptions, does not even have an auditing department. We simply hire an accountant at the end of each fiscal year to do the books.

Besides, people are intimidated and discouraged from cooperating with us. Our supporters are subject to arrest while handing out party literature or posters. Whenever we have a meeting at the party's headquarters, the surrounding streets are closed by dozens of policemen who harass those arriving to attend.

The party has failed to bring all Nasserists into its fold. How do you explain this?

Establishing the party was another problem. Nasserists had to fight a long and fierce battle with the government, and other groups, before their party came into existence on the strength of a court decision and against the will of the Political Parties Committee.

When this battle ended, Nasserists were divided into several conflicting groups. There was the 1960s group, members of the ASU, cabinet ministers and governors, whose politics were shaped while working with the late President Nasser. Another group was the 1970s students, who had set up Nasserist forums in universities; they were totally self-reliant and had no guidance or organised bodies. There were also groups of workers and farmers who championed the achievements of the Nasserist era. For these components to merge into one entity is a complicated process that requires time and effort.

The party's poor performance has been blamed on the split between the "old guard" and the younger generation. The latter describe you as ex-state functionaries who lack creativity while still monopolising authority.

These are mere allegations and twisting of facts that indicate self-interest. Those who make these allegations, disregarding our special way of applying democracy, are after power, not the party's best interests. They should not have leading positions in a party that carries Nasser's name.

If we are going to stick to democracy, we should show respect for the outcome of the democratic process. Since the establishment of the party, all its high posts have been filled by election by the party's general congress.

The party's dissenters claim that the election was rigged, but any election can be the target of such accusations. Although these people are a minority, no more than 30, they have equal representation in the party's political bureau.

As for myself, I was appointed only once in a governmental position, as minister of social affairs under Nasser, and that was only for a brief period. But I have held other posts — I was a member of the ASU Central Committee and Higher Executive Committee — by election.

I am not planning to run for election for another term as party leader. I am going to retire to my home village, where I will work to serve the interests of my constituents.

There is a trend within the party that advocates a coalition with the Islamists, despite hostility towards them under Nasser. How do you view this?

The Islamists have made their presence felt in Egypt and other Arab countries and this is a fact. We do not wish to be involved in further conflict with them, although they do not hide their feelings of hostility towards us. We no longer think of the past, but I think that neither the Nasserists nor the Islamists are ready to forget this past.

As a political party, we cannot ignore the other existing parties or ideologies, regardless of whether we agree or disagree with them. But we are not involved in any sort of compromise or coalition with any of these trends.

Would you favour the establishment of an Islamist political party?

Certainly not. My personal point of view is that the call for applying Islamic *Shari'a* cannot be accepted as a pretext for turning *ulamas* [Muslim scholars] into politicians. I am completely opposed to a theocratic government.

Ijtihad [interpretation of the Qur'an and Mohamed's sayings] is the job for a scholar, but that scholar is not entitled to impose his views on others.

The Islamists do not have a programme and their policies do not go beyond slogans. They uphold the slogan: "Islam is the solution" which we, as Muslims, do not dispute. But they have yet to explain how landlord-tenant or public sector problems can be addressed in the context of this slogan.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

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A bullet in the heart

The unthinkable happened. Extremism struck at the heart of Israeli society. What lies behind the bullet, and beyond it?

'A duty, not a visit'

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak spent half a day in Israel on his first ever visit to the Jewish state as president only to "pay condolences" and not as a political statement, writes **Nevine Khalil**.

Since he became president, Mubarak has declined many invitations to visit Israel. "This is not a visit," Mubarak told a press conference on Monday morning before he boarded his plane. "This is a duty. We have a commitment to attend the funeral."

Mubarak has visited Israel once before, as vice-president with President Anwar El-Sadat, when they stopped over for a few hours in the southern Israeli town of Beersheba. Mubarak compared Rabin to the late President Sadat, who was assassinated by Islamic radicals opposed to Egypt's peace treaty with Israel. "Sadat was a very courageous man [whose] initiative with Israel was the main key to peace," Mubarak told reporters at Cairo airport.

The president was accompanied by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, who cut short his attendance of the Group of 15 conference in Buenos Aires, and Information Minister Safwat Al-Sherif. Mubarak's entourage also included the deputy chairman of the ruling National Democratic Party, Mustafa Khalil, who as prime minister under Sadat was an architect of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, as well as a number of senior journalists.

Mubarak and King Hussein of Jordan were the only Arabs among the 40 world leaders to attend the funeral, although representatives of four other Arab countries were also present. PLO chairman Yasser Arafat watched the ceremony on television in his Gaza office, citing Israeli security concerns for his absence at the funeral at Mount Hezl military cemetery in Jerusalem.

Seated between the US's Clinton and UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali, Mubarak looked solemn in the front row while other world leaders, some of them tearful, mourned Rabin.

Speaking after Israeli President Ezer Weizman, King Hussein, President Clinton and acting Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Mubarak described Rabin as a "courageous leader" and a "fallen hero of peace". Rabin, Mubarak said, had tackled the Palestinian issue in a "forthright manner [laying] the foundations of peaceful coexistence between the Palestinians and Israelis in a climate of trust and mutual respect". While Rabin's death dealt "a severe blow" to the peace process, "we must redouble our efforts to continue the sacred mission. We must deprive those treacherous hands hostile towards our goal from reaping the rewards of their vile actions." Mubarak concluded his address by extending his condolences and that of the Egyptian people to the Israelis and to Rabin's family.

At the end of the ceremony, Mubarak filed past Rabin's widow, Leah, paying his respects with a firm handshake.

Blue baseball caps were handed out to the guests to shield them from the sun and to act as a head cover, in keeping with Jewish religious tradition. The caps, a reminder of Rabin, who often wore a baseball cap when on field visits, were a less politically-charged alternative to the *kippa* (Jewish skull cap) which various Western leaders, including President Clinton, Prince Charles and Helmut Kohl, wore at the ceremony. Mubarak wore the blue baseball cap as he walked up the hill to the burial site, but took it off as he stood by Rabin's grave.

Mubarak, along with other foreign leaders, was scheduled to address a special ceremony in the Knesset after the funeral, but the plan was dropped. After the funeral Mubarak held talks with Clinton for over an hour, and also met with President Ezer Weizman and Peres at his residence in the King David Palace.



President Mubarak offers his condolences to Mrs Rabin, after his address at the funeral *(photo: Reuter)*

Israeli tension, PNA apprehension

Despite the many assurances that the peace process will continue, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are deeply worried about the future. **Tarek Hassan** reports from Gaza

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was evidently shocked by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, but it is now seriously worried about the future of the peace process. Although Shimon Peres reiterated his government's position on peace minutes after the assassination of Rabin, the PNA and most Palestinians were keeping their fingers crossed.

Emergency meetings are being held regularly by leading members of the PNA to keep a close eye on developments in Israel, lest Peres lose control. These worries are due mainly to the serious opposition that has been facing Peres from army leaders in the Labour Party, a leading Palestinian official, who asked to remain anonymous, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

The crisis inside the Labour Party, according to the official, may lead to problems for the peace process. "Arab Israeli groups are seriously divided," he said. "The Israeli left is in a bad shape and the internal situation of the Labour Party isn't encouraging. This is despite the fact that the assassination has dealt the right wing a serious blow. The situation in Israel might lead to a new political map being drawn up."

Several Israeli and American officials telephoned Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat after the assassination to confirm the two countries' commitment to peace in the region. For his part Arafat put the Palestinian forces in Gaza on maximum alert. The two militant Islamist groups, Hamas and Jihad, were warned against taking any illegal action during this period. They were asked not to show any outward signs of gloating over Rabin's death.

According to one senior Palestinian official, Palestinian security had earlier warned its Israeli counterpart about Iyal, the organisation to which the assassin Yigal Amir belongs. The organisation is a faction of the radical anti-Arab group Kach, founded by Rabbi Meir Kahane. "This organisation issued a serious statement a month ago, saying they would kill Arabs and Jews to topple Rabin's government," the Palestinian official said. "But Israeli security felt that the Palestinians had exaggerated the significance of the statement. They had such overwhelming confidence in their democracy, turning a blind eye to the dangers around them. Israeli security did not pay any attention to what we told them about underground groups, which resemble those in the French army during its occupation of Algeria that tried to assassinate General De Gaulle."

Israeli security has been much more concerned about Islamist terrorism than Jewish terrorism, the Palestinian security official said. Despite the recurrent terrorist activities against Palestinians, Israeli settlers and the religious right were left armed and strong under the gaze of the government and its security establishment.

The major question, widely being discussed among Palestinian officials now, is whether the assassination of Rabin and the presence of a weakened Labour government in Israel will have a negative impact on the peace process, especially on its Israeli-Palestinian track?"

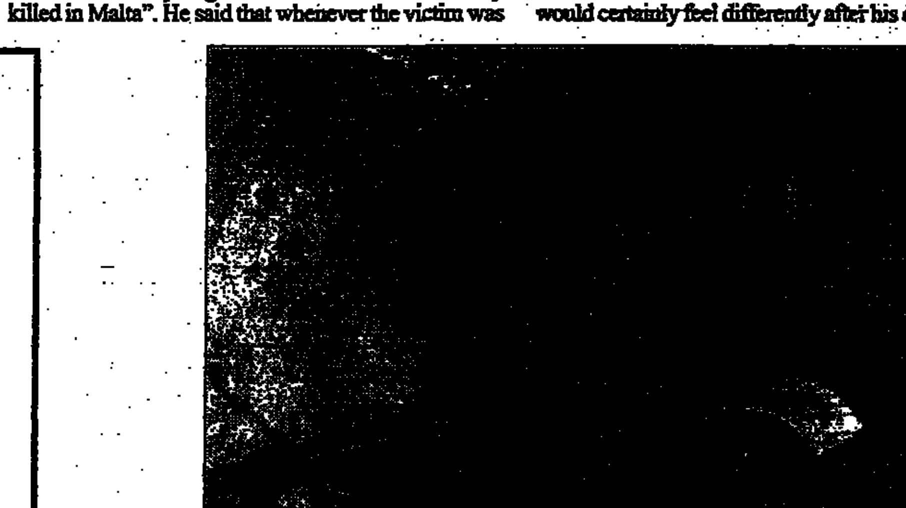
If confusion and fear are the main components of the PNA's reaction to the assassination, both Hamas and Jihad seem relieved. However, their attitude has not been echoed in the streets of Gaza or the West Bank. Leading members of Jihad believe that the assassination of Rabin came as a "just revenge for the killing of Fathi Shakaki". Shakaki was the leader of Jihad who was assassinated in Malta late last month. Mossad has been blamed for the assassination which was dealt a serious blow to the group. Nafiz Azam, a member of Jihad, told the *Weekly* that those now condemning political assassinations "contradicted themselves a few days ago when Shakaki was brutally killed in Malta". He said that whenever the victim was a Palestinian the assassination was not condemned.

However, few Palestinians in Gaza share Jihad's and Hamas' relief. Much of the population received the news with apprehension. Adham Grada, a taxi driver, said the assassination of Rabin ran against the national interests of the Palestinians. "It will certainly have a negative impact on the peace process," he said. Many in Gaza sighed in relief when it was announced the assassin was a Jew and not an Arab.

Mahmoud Zahar, Hamas spokesman in Gaza, believes that Rabin is responsible for his own violent end. Zahar said that Rabin had ordered the most violent acts against the Palestinians during the Intifada. For five years, Rabin's motto when fighting the young Palestinians in Gaza was "let's break their bones". This violent attitude, according to Zahar, rooted itself among young Jews in the territories. Zahar also ruled out the possibility of Israeli society unifying, "because of the fierce enmity between radicals on both sides, the left and the right". Zahar said that those who suffered from Rabin's brutal violence during his lifetime would certainly feel differently after his death.







A soldier still at the helm?

How will Israel's new defence minister affect Arab-Israeli negotiations, asks **Galal Nassar**

The appointment of Ehud Barak as Israel's defence minister following the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin did not come as a surprise to close observers of the Israeli political scene. It has often been said that Israel has no foreign policy, only domestic policies that determine the course of matters inside and outside Israel.

In addition, the nature of the Israeli political system allows for the easy shift from the military to the political arena. This explains why military leaders of long experience in Arab-Israeli wars have tended to rise to high political positions as if the conflict is continuous and Israel and its people are one large army in a permanent state of readiness. Most Israeli prime ministers have assumed the joint responsibilities of premier and defence minister, underscoring the defence ministry's role in determining the political agenda of the other ministries. Besides, the minister of defence also controls the Mossad, the Israeli secret service network.

Threatened by the rise of popularity of Likud leader Benyamin Netanyahu, Rabin appointed Barak as interior minister. Rabin hoped to use him as a trump card to balance the power between Labour and Likud and absorb the anger and criticism that extremists have directed at the Labour led-government.

It is believed that Barak would not have accepted the post of defence minister without being promised a higher post such as leader of the party and perhaps one day the job of prime minister. Otherwise, why would Barak join a government with less than a year to run?

Even Martin Indyk, the US ambassador fo Israel is reported to have said, "The Labour Party would not be able to win the coming elections unless Barak leads the party." A public opinion poll conducted recently in Israel found 78 per cent of the Israelis "quiet satisfied" with Barak's performance.

A few days before Rabin's assassination, political analysts in Israel predicted that Barak, the former chief of staff who left his post last January to be replaced by General Amnon Shahak, will play a leading political role in the future. Observers trace his anticipated political advancement to his long military career spanning 36 years. It is believed that Barak will also be able to entice the newly-formed Third Road, originally a dissident faction of the Labour Party headed by former army leaders, back into the party. From an Arab standpoint, Barak's past record cast doubts over the future of the peace process if he ever reaches the top of political power in Israel. Barak was the mastermind behind the assassination of three Palestinian leaders, Kamal Nassar, Kamal Adwan and Youssef Al-Naggar, in 1973 in Beirut, and that of Abu Jihad in 1988 in Tunis.

Barak, who was leader of Israel's intelligence service in 1982, is known for his intransigent position over the Golan Heights, a stand that may attract a great number of Likud supporters to his side. He also has several reservations over the Oslo agreement, in addition to his hardline position over Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon.

His appointment is likely to a be accompanied by new security arrangements due to the differences between Barak and Rabin's security perspectives: redeployment of Israeli security forces in the Occupied Territories, in the border situation in South Lebanon, and on the question of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, as well as in future negotiations over the question of the status of Jerusalem. The onus will most likely lie with the Arab negotiators and their ability to utilise the current Israeli public sentiment in favour of peace to ensure a fair and well paced implementation of the land-for-peace formula.

Shadows on the right

Fanatics, shadowy movements on the fringes of Israeli politics — or the logical, if unsavoury, offspring of a violent culture? **Julie Till** investigates Israel's far right-wing groups

A lone gunman, acting on his own, inspired by God. That is how Yigal Amir, the 27-year old Israeli law student who pumped three bullets into the body of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin described himself. There was another lone gunman at the Hebron mosque in February of last year. Baruch Goldstein also believed in his divinely ordained mission. Twenty-nine Palestinians died.

Behind these two men lies the shadowy world of Israel's far right movements. Preaching a religious mythical message but with a clear political agenda, their hallmarks are extreme hostility to Arabs, a belief that the Land of Israel was given to the Jewish people by God and a fervent opposition to the PLO-Israeli peace process.

It is this climate of hatred which lies behind the assassination. Over the last year in particular, says Hassan Asfour, general director of Peace Now and a Palestinian negotiator, the discourse of the right has become increasingly violent. For months, followers of the far right have been holding demonstrations outside the prime minister's office and burning pictures of Rabin and Peres. Their banners and placards warned that giving away an inch of the holy land meant a betrayal of God and Jews, punishable by death.

But there was a reluctance to take their threats seriously. After all, the enemy had always had an Arab face. According to Azmi Bishara, a political scientist at Bir Zeit University, this deep rooted belief in one nation, one people was shared across the political spectrum. It blinded Israelis to the violent potential (or the actual violence against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories) of these far right groups.

Amir is linked to one such group, Iyal, an offshoot of the racist Kach movement founded in New York by Rabbi Meir Kahane. After Kahane was shot dead in 1990, the movement split into three main groups: Kach, Kahane Chai (Kahane Lives) and Iyal. In the wake of the Hebron massacre Kach and Kahane Chai were declared illegal and excluded from the 1992 elections by the Israeli Supreme Court, but they have continued to operate in a half-open, half-clandestine manner.

Kach and Kahane Chai are the most prominent, and perhaps the most extreme, of these groups. There are many more though, small in numbers and not always long lasting, but vocal enough to terrorise the political environment. Rashad El-Shami, a professor at the Hebrew Department of Ains Shams University, argues that groups like Kahane Chai and Iyal are part of one network, albeit demonstrating different levels of violence and extremism. The settler movements like Gush Emonim and Umana Heikal, the official religious parties like the Moledet, Yahud It-Torah, Shas and the National Religious Party and the underground far right organisations share the same objectives and beliefs, if not the same methods, he says.

On certain points they overlap with the Likud Party — rejection of the peace process, rejection of Israeli redeployment and rejection of Oslo I and II. This network, he says, extends further than Israel. Support and funds can be found in the United States and also in Europe. Both Goldstein and Kahane were from the orthodox Jewish community in Brooklyn, New York.

While the assassination has been condemned by both supporters and opponents of the current peace process, this prevailing rhetoric of rejection perhaps explains why Amir did not seem to stand out so starkly from his colleagues. One classmate described him as simply an "all-Israeli guy". According to Tikva Honig-Parnass, the Israeli editor of *News from Within* at the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem, that is precisely the problem.

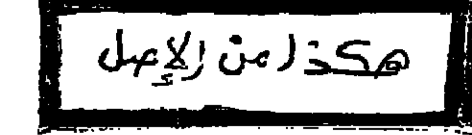
Although these groups are clearly on the margins of Israeli politics, they exist because the ideology underpinning mainstream society has not changed. Even after Oslo, Zionist sentiment holds sway, legitimising the actions and attitudes of the settlement movement. "There has," she says, "been no change in the political discourse, no self-criticism, no criticism of the past."

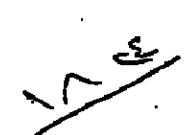
In 1995, continues Honig-Parnass, the highest number of settlements were built since 1992 when Labour took power. "There has been no attempt to delegitimise the settlement movement, even by the Labour government." In this atmosphere there is indirect support for these radicals: "They are simply taking the politics of the right to the extreme."

This violent subculture does not just belong to far right groups. Imad Gad, an expert in the International Relations Unit of the Al-Ahram Centre for Strategic Studies in Cairo, argues that it is grounded in official policy. He recalls how it was Rabin as minister of defence in 1988 who gave the settlers the right to be armed and called for the bones of Palestinians to be broken during the Intifada.

Rabin's decision still receives official sanction. As one Israeli government official told the *Weekly*: "There is a legitimate need for self defence. The settlers have real fears." But now, it seems so do other Israelis. Maybe now, as Bishara suggests, Israelis "will have to look in the mirror and face the ugly violence in their society."

Edited by **Mirvat Diab**







Twin terror

By Lutfi El-Kholi

If there is one thing political observers at home and abroad agree on without exception, it is that the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by a compatriot was never considered so much as a possibility — especially after nearly half a century of Arab-Israeli conflict.

If anyone predicted an assassination, it was *that of Yasser Arafat or King Hussein* at the hands of Palestinian or Jordanian religious militants. Both of these leaders have agreed, from the point of view of their opponents, to concede the minimum demands of Palestinians and Arabs in order to reach a settlement with Israel.

As such, they could be considered traitors to the cherished principles of Islam and the Arab nation and thus deserved punishment. Moreover, the militants have an important precedent: the assassination of President Anwar El-Sadat by a young officer in Egypt's Islamic Jihad, Khaled El-Islambouli.

However, none of these predictions came true. Instead, the Israeli equivalent to Khaled El-Islambouli emerged from the ranks of Jewish extremists to declare that God had commanded him to kill Rabin in punishment for his treachery to religious teachings and Israeli rights. The young law student, Yigal Amir, did not repent his act.

So stunned was the world by Rabin's assassination that the event was described by many as the first time that a Jew had killed another Jew over political or ideological differences.

This is historically inaccurate. There are numerous instances which contradict *this* assertion. In 1948, for example, Ben Gurion, at the head of the Haganah, the core of the Israeli army, ordered the bombing of a ship carrying Jewish immigrants to Israel. The ship had arrived in Haifa laden with arms intended to reinforce the extremist Zionist Stern gang, headed by *Menachem Begin*. The group opposed what it considered Ben Gurion's treachery in accepting the division of Palestine with the Arabs, in accordance with UN resolutions.

Since that time, Israelis have insisted that they have brought Jewish terrorists and racists under control, to the extent that former extremists, such as Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, occupied government positions. Moreover, Begin concluded a peace accord with Sadat following the American-sponsored Camp David negotiations. Thus, they claim, the democratic contest between contending political forces has been *resolved, and assassination and terrorism* have been uprooted from the Israeli political arena.

What Israel has been able to accomplish, they go on to profess, has been tragically lacking in the Arab world, from the assassination of King Abdallah of Jordan in the 1940s to that of President Sadat in the 1980s. This view deliberately overlooks Israel's treatment of the Arabs, whose land has been confiscated by savage force and massive bloodshed, and the murder of prisoners of war who were first ordered to dig their own graves.

In other words, while the Western world sang the praises of Israeli democracy, this democracy was for Israeli consumption only. Meanwhile, the Western press remained virtually blind to the brutal current of terrorism which operated with impunity against the Arabs and Palestinians.

This contradiction between the overt and covert faces of Israel explains why the Israeli government, army and society have deliberately planted members of racist and religious extremist groups in the numerous organisations and settlements intended to counter the Arab resistance. It is thus that the law of the jungle has been allowed to prevail.

With the support of Jews at home and abroad, the armed settlements and racist organisations have gained considerable leverage in directing Israeli policy. The *government* and the army closed their eyes to — if they did not actually rush to aid and abet — their activities. We can trace this from the blockade and extermination of entire villages in the '40s to the Hebron massacre in the '90s.

However, the organic unity between the government and the terrorist groups has begun to crack. In the light of recent developments, some forces in Israel have come to realise that Israel cannot remain an armed fortress and that it cannot contain the Palestinian popular resistance and Intifada. They have, therefore, decided to opt for a peaceful settlement with the Palestinians and Arabs. It has also become apparent that Yasser Arafat has led his people from resistance in the diaspora to the quest for national sovereignty at home.

To a certain extent the Palestinians have succeeded in ending the occupation and filling the void with a form of autonomy that bears the seeds for a national Palestinian entity. To a certain extent as well, it is evident that Israel is backing away from its claim to "Greater Israel".

In spite of the fact that the first Israeli-Palestinian accord in the history of the conflict may lead to a compromise solution acceptable to Israeli and Palestinian national authorities, for extremist groups on both *sides it constitutes* a violation of "fixed and sacred rights". As such, these rights have been and remain a focal point for violent opposition.

What is new, in my opinion, is that Israeli religious militants have now realised, after nearly two years, that their government is not engaging merely in tactical manoeuvrings. As they perceived events proceeding steadily in this direction, Palestinians were no longer their sole target. They developed a two-pronged antagonism towards Palestinians and their accomplices — Israeli traitors in the government. Rabin headed the list, and there was no alternative but to physically annihilate him as a lesson to others.

Rabin has been succeeded by Shimon Peres. *Although Peres represents continuity* in seeking a compromise solution with the Palestinians and Arabs, the situation has grown more complex and heated in the wake of Rabin's assassination. The movement of racist violence among the settlers has shaken Israel in its entirety.

Israel can no longer back down from the peace process. It would provoke destructive chaos within, receive the condemnation of the Palestinians, the Arabs and the world, including the United States, and divide international Jewish opinion. Rather it should adopt a new resolve, as it has required from Yasser Arafat, against those terrorist organisations that have delivered it such a violent blow.

Here precisely lies the responsibility of Peres who has taken over the helm. But the aged, wavering minister is *haunted by the spectre of Rabin's* bullet-ridden body and Yigal Amir's gun. One can only ask, therefore, whether, after this transitional period, the forthcoming Knesset elections will give rise to a new government capable of overcoming the spectre of assassination in order to reach a political settlement with more solid and equitable foundations. Or will it let the madness of total violence destroy a fragile settlement?

'Et tu Yigal'



Killers in God's name



By George McGovern

Twenty years ago, *as chairman of the Middle East Subcommittee* of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, I flew into Riyadh for an appointment with King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. On arrival at the Riyadh airport I was told that the appointment with the King had been cancelled as well as a dinner to have been hosted for me that night by the Saudi leader of OPEC, Sheikh Zaki Yamani. An hour later, US Ambassador James Aikins and I were told why these appointments had been cancelled: King Faisal had been assassinated while we were in the air en route from Jeddah to Riyadh.

This week, following my arrival in Saudi Arabia two decades later, I was told that the Prime Minister of Israel Yitzhak Rabin, had just been assassinated.

As an American I have *experienced the shock of* assassination several times in the murders of colleagues and friends: John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King. American Presidents Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield and William McKinley also died at the hands of assassins. I quickly learned as the Presidential nominee of the Democratic Party in 1972 that I could not stay alive *without the constant protection of the US Secret Service.*

It is too bad that public figures are at risk in every society. There is always the danger that some disturbed and twisted personality will vent his sickness or fury on the life of a nation's leaders. In the case of Mr Rabin, a young Israeli law student had apparently become so furious over the Israeli leader's efforts *to arrive at a peaceful compromise with the Pal*estinians that the imagined God had anointed him to kill the prime minister. He had also wished to murder the Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Both Mr Rabin and Mr Peres have been my friends for a quarter of a century. We were all born in the same year, *1922. My public* career in the US, *both in the military* service and in national politics, has paralleled Mr Rabin's. He graciously hosted me in Israel as an ambassador to the US.

Mr Rabin generally took a harder, more militant line toward the Palestinian and other Arabs than I thought wise. But in recent years he has cautiously moved along to a more open and constructive relationship with the Arabs that has made possible a tentative peace settlement with Yasser Arafat and the Palestinians. Perhaps Israeli politics required a hard-line military hero and savvy political leader such as Yitzhak Rabin to lead the Israeli public into acceptance of talks with the PLO and such key Arab leaders as King Hussein and President Hafez Al-Assad of Syria.

I believe that Israel's experienced and capable acting Prime *Minister Shimon Peres is the ideal man to continue the work of* his fallen colleague in advancing the work of peace and development.

Paradoxically, the assassin who thought he could stop the negotiations of peace with the Palestinians by killing Yitzhak Rabin may have actually enhanced the peace process. There is considerable evidence that the extremists on both sides who have always been *the enemies of peace, now look far less appealing* and relevant than they might have appeared to some in the past.

The loss of a strong leader whose life was dedicated to his nation and who was their elected spokesman is a gut-wrenching trauma for the people of Israel. It should remind all of us of our fragile mortality and of the necessity of cooperation if we are to live at peace on this earth.

*Every decent human being should repudiate criminals who im*agine that God has ordained them to kill those who speak for peace, such as the late President Anwar El-Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Every concerned citizen of the world must now work harder for peace and justice to redeem such brutal and irrational murders.

The writer is president of the US-based Middle East Policy Council and former Democratic senator from South Dakota.

Israel's right is wrong



By Jerrold D. Green

It is ironic that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's murderer probably strengthened the very peace process that he so violently opposed. Yet it is hard to understand why any sane Israeli would oppose peace. *Surely the explanation cannot rely exclusively* on the predations of murderous Palestinians, some real and most imagined, hell bent on the destruction of the Jewish state. For what then of Rabin's murderer who, in his own way, assaulted the values thought to be synonymous with the self same Jewish state that he purports to defend?

No Arab has ever hurt Israel more than did Yigal Amir. How secure can the Jewish state be when its prime minister had far more to fear from a fellow Israeli Jew than he did from a Palestinian? What value is a Jewish homeland where political murder, not the ballot box, becomes a vehicle for political change?

Whether they like it or not, those Israelis and their supporters abroad who oppose the peace process are likely to be viewed, for a time at least, as being in league with the murderer of Rabin. Yet as unfair as this may be, where were those denizens of the right when Rabin was being hung in effigy or otherwise vilified? The Israeli right may not have been responsible for these actions, but there is no *evidence it ever opposed them either. Although collective* guilt is an odious concept, its opposite is not collective innocence. In its hunger for political power, much of the Israeli right tried to mortgage Israeli national security to its own short term goals and gains. These groups created a political climate and culture of collective irresponsibility. And although one lunatic took this to its obscene if logical conclusion, let us not delude ourselves into believing that he is one of a kind.

In the aftermath of this horrible tragedy, the Israeli right played its part well. It read its script to perfection and disavowed any culpability in the horror that engulfed it alongside genuinely peace loving Israelis. Yet in its opposition to peace — *for if Rabin's plan is not synonymous with peace then what plan* is — the Israeli right has put itself on a collision course with the destiny of the State of Israel. With the murder of Yitzhak Rabin, the world was given a preview of what to expect if Israel does not make peace. And Israel must make peace not only with its neighbours, a virtual fait accompli anyway, but also with itself.

Israel will persist with the peace process because it has no viable alternatives and because it is the best and the right thing to do. Palestinian rights and Israeli security have become synonyms not antonyms. Both Israelis and Palestinians lose when innocents are killed, be they Arab or Israeli. And the opposition of the Israeli right to the peace process is now seen for what it is, political trickery and deceit, posturing and politicking, not a true search for security. For security will only be found when the Yigal Amirs are locked up and Israelis and Palestinians realise how their fates are locked as well.

The venality of the political class in Israel has given voice to a monster that has long been afoot in the land. And what the Israeli right must learn is that the game of politics is no longer about gaining office, but instead has become about the lives of *the office holders themselves. This horrible lesson will not be* lost on most Israelis who must come to realise that Rabin's only crime was the search for peace. And if the Israeli right ever hopes to attain office, it must do so within the context of peace, which the peoples of this war torn region so desperately deserve.

Yigal Amir, through his barbarous conduct, has rejuvenated the very peace process he so violently opposed.

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Real soul-searching is yet to begin

By Tikva Honig-Parnass

In the two days since the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, we have been witnesses to the extraordinary phenomenon of a whole nation mourning its fallen leader. People from all layers of society, and of all ages (but especially youths), have not ceased to file past the casket of Yitzhak Rabin, lying in state in front of the Knesset, and later to gather outside the house of the Rabin family and in the city plaza in Tel Aviv in which he was murdered, to mourn in an intensely personal fashion — and yet collectively — the death of the leader.

What is being displayed is the well-known phenomenon of Israel as a tribe, one bound together not merely by links of blood and kinship, but even more by the sharing of fundamental ideological assumptions. The tribe is gathering to mourn its slain father, but also to close ranks and demonstrate its unity in the face of an attempt to strike at the very foundations of its basic loyalties. It also reflects the hopes for a more peaceful future, however illusory it may be to make Rabin and what he stands for a repository of such hopes.

This time no one can, or wants to, dismiss the act as the vile deed of a "lone individual from the margins of society whose motives are insane" — as they did in the past when killings and massacres of Arab-Palestinians were carried out by members or sympathizers of Israel's extreme right-wing para-military groupings. Not just because the assassin is a former member of an elite combat unit in the Israeli army, born in Israel, and an excellent law student who was a participating in "civil rebellion" demonstrations of extremist settlers and a leader of openly functioning chapter Iyal ("Jewish Fighting Organisation", an off-shoot of the outlawed Kahanist movement). But there is more to it than these facts which speak for themselves: this time, as with past cases of right-wing violence, the deed struck at the government's legitimacy. But this time the victim was not an Arab, but a Jew, indeed the leader of the tribe itself.

This murder was indeed the product of a developed ideology and systematic political course. However, although it was apparently not the direct product of a plan by any organisation, one may still point to circles of influence which helped form the climate in which the assassin came to the conclusion that it was permitted to kill the prime minister of the State of Israel for political reasons.

Representatives of the ruling centre-left coalition have already pointed the finger of blame for Rabin's murder at those leaders of the right who, over the past year, have tolerated an unprecedented and ever-intensifying vilification of Rabin ("murderer" and "traitor" were typical epithets), which was accompanied by verbal threats on his life and the lives of government ministers and their families. Even if the leaders of the parties of the parliamentary right, including the Likud, Tsomet, and the National Religious Party, did not initiate the escalation of the violent threats, they exploited it for their own ends, and allowed it to be freely expressed at demonstrations at which they spoke. What is perhaps more important is that these parties and leaders took an active part in the delegitimisation of the government of Israel and even of the democratic principles on which it is nominally based. "A parliamentary majority resting on the support of 'Arab parties' is not a legitimate majority," was a slogan openly and frequently proclaimed by prominent Likud spokespersons, not just by the extreme right, who are the main carriers of the consistent anti-democratic tendency, especially a part of the religious-Zionist stream among the settlers. Their rabbis have proclaimed that according to *Halacha* (Jewish religious law), "the holiness (read: the settlement) of the Land of Israel takes precedence over the rule of law and government decisions." Rabin's assassin was educated in the institutions of this circle.

However, not all the blame can be placed on the extreme right. Far from it. Two other circles of influence, more distant from the assassin's own immediate circle, enabled him to violate the taboos of the Israeli tribe, by striking at its self-conception of internal cohesion and sharing a basic ideology in common. The first is reflected in the way the leaders of the Labour Party responded to the settlers who challenged their legitimacy and that of the Oslo Accords. In the public discourse concerning the settlements that has taken place since the inception of Oslo, never once have the settlements been delegitimized. On the contrary. The leaders of the Labour Party continue to view the settlers as "Zionist pioneers", and "understand their pain". Labour Party leaders continue to admire the settlers' "Zionist motives" and their "patriotism". They adopt settlers' rhetoric and are defensive about themselves. Moreover, the courts in Israel have been incredibly lenient towards settlers who have organised attacks on Palestinian Arab persons and property. underlying all this is the policy of the government *to continue construction in the settlements, the better* to be able to impose its plan for the permanent settlement.

But the most important factor is that Israel signed a 'peace' agreement with part of the PLO without changing its basic ideology or public discourse. The apparent "historic compromise" does not include any substantive recognition of the national rights of the Palestinian people nor of the *PLO* as a national liberation movement. *It is still* viewed as a gang of terrorists, which by force of circumstance — an unfavourable balance of power — was compelled to come to terms with Israel. The public discourse, whose parameters are set by the political establishment, has no space for genuine soul-searching regarding the historical nature of the Zionist movement, the dispossession of the Palestinian people from its land since 1948, and Israel's state terrorism in the territories occupied in 1967 and in Lebanon. In fact, the opposite seems to be occurring. Since the inception of the Oslo Accords, the government has adopted more and more aspects of the credo of the right. Because of the continued prevalence of the discourse which justifies the Zionist claim to the entire land on religious grounds, the very sound pragmatic arguments for the peace process from the point of view of Israel's "national interests" (greater international acceptance, an opening up of the regional economy, lightening of the "defense" burden, etc.) might leave many unconvinced (since it may well involve some "territorial compromise"). Moreover, the ideology of the Zionist left still makes the Zionist state a supreme value — ultimately more important than any commitment to democracy — just as does that of the *right.*

In the light of the above, the new version of Zionism propounded by the religious-Zionist extreme right, which attempts to use quotations from *Halacha* in order to delegitimise any government that even considers a mild version of "territorial compromise" is bound to strike many as the most consistent application of Zionism — the shared ideology of "*all* the tribe" — even to the point of the murder of the tribal father by a small extremist group. For the assassin and his circle, the state and its leaders are not the focus of tribal loyalty, as they are for the vast majority of Israelis, as we are witnessing. And yet it is Zionism which has fostered the anti-state version of itself.

The real soul-searching that Israel must now undertake concerns the nature of its legitimating ideology, Zionism, but it does not yet seem that Israelis as a people are prepared to do so. The deep revulsion of what has happened is likely to modify attitudes somewhat in the next few months, and bring about a more restrained political atmosphere. Support for the peace process will probably increase. But the values and ideology shared by the left and right in Israel will, in the long-run, if they are not as some point challenged, spoil the possibility of seeing the process through its logical conclusion.

The writer is editor of News From Within, *a monthly journal published by the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem.*

Not the murder but the murdered

By Azmy Bishara

The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin could become a turning point in Israeli history not only because it is the first assassination of a senior Israeli politician, but because it may suggest an opportunity for Israeli society to face the huge amount of violence that accumulated within it and *its public life over the years.*

The violence was directed mainly against the enemy image of the Arabs and against real Arabs in the occupied territories, in the refugee camps in Lebanon, in the destruction of the Palestinian village, the Palestinian city and the Palestinian society.

Only lately the systematic killings of Egyptian war prisoners from the 1967 and 1956 wars were revealed in the Israeli press. Yitzhak Rabin is a victim of the peace process. His dramatic death after participating in a peace song in a rally organised to mobilise support for his government should not conceal the fact that Rabin's role was not marginal in the continuous series of violence. More than that, Rabin was needed as *a cover for* the peace process precisely due to his military career since 1948. Legitimacy even for peace in this country must be given by generals.

The violence did not burst out in interior affairs and was kept under control not only by Israel's democracy but also *due to* its communitarian character buttressed with a strong feeling of a community under siege. The unprecedented rage against the assassination felt deeply in Israel in spite of the Rabin myth-and-image industry already undertaken by the media is rooted not in the danger posed by it to Israeli democracy but to the communitarian character of this democracy.

The murderer did not kill only the community but also the father himself. What is more painful is that the killer had the character of a son. He was neither a settler nor one of these weird immigrants from the United States coming to Israel in search of an identity and dubbing Rabin a traitor even before learning to speak Hebrew. The gunman came from an urban centre of the country, a soldier in the elite army unit of 'Golani' and a third year law student.

This same young man could have killed more than one Palestinian without any threat to *Israeli* democracy because externalising violence against non-Jews and having different moral and legal criteria for Jews and non-Jews is more than legitimate. It is a guarantee for the smooth functioning of the communitarian democracy. The community was weakened by the modernisation process, the economic boom, the growth of the middle class and the social differentiation. Israel became a consumption society and the Spartan bond that fused together individual, community and the state was loosened.

The sense of siege was weakened by the Camp David agreement and later Oslo, and most of all by Israel's sense of self-confidence after winning the military conflict with the Arabs. With the removal of the main checks, violence broke out, climaxing in the killing of the prime minister. The shock is so dramatic that the Israeli society will not be able to avoid dealing with its violence, although the Rabin myth just being manufactured has a dominant militarist component, and although the first attempt to contain the shock will be the reproduction of the *community in the form of national unity of grief. This at*tempt will not hold against both the peace process and economic development.

The most important source of internal violence is the nationalist religious ideology represented not only by settlers but also by the increasingly nationalised segments of society as a reaction to the loss of the community. This ideology mixes racism with religious eschatology in which the most important commandment is keeping the territorial integrity of the "land of Israel". The unification of the biblical "Land of Israel" with the State of Israel caused nationalism and messianism to overlap. Until then the national religious movement used to be a compromise between religiosity and nationalism, after 1967 it became a convergence of both, charged with a lot of violence and with few moral prohibitions. This ideology believes that it is part of a historical eschatological plan which relativises any morality, democracy or rule of law. Until now the Palestinians alone had to face this ideology represented *by the settlers, after Rabin's death the Israelis too* will have to deal with it.

Ironically, Rabin contributed more to peace with his death than he did in his life. Israeli public opinion was never so supportive of the peace process than it is now, and the Israeli right was never so reluctant to go against it to the streets. One of the most prominent leaders of the settlers expressed his fear some hours after Rabin's death that the campaign against Oslo lost its morality. A deep feeling prevails in Israel that the integrity of the land threatens to destroy the integrity of the people.

Just how determined is the Israeli leadership in utilising the beneficial public atmosphere for the intensification of the peace process remains to be seen. After the massacre in Hebron there was a public atmosphere against the settlers, but it was not exploited to dismantle the most provocative settlements, at least. The impossible complexity of Oslo II *stems* from Israel's insistence on keeping all the settlements in a sea of security arrangements including a new wave of confiscation of Arab lands for the purpose of paving new highways for the settlers surrounding Arab townships.

It seems the Israeli peacemakers are not determined to achieve a wholesale historical compromise but are rather interested in bargaining according to the balance of powers. The settlements are needed for bargaining the best deal. They should remain for the negotiations of the so-called permanent solution, then some settlements will be dismantled and others will stay. In the meantime, Israel is expanding the settlements. The Palestinian entity is tak*ing more and more the shape of a group of bantustans sur*rounded by settlements that enjoy the privileges of a *Herrenvolk* democracy.

A psychological campaign against Peres is launched already with the claim that without Rabin's cover he will not be able to proceed with the peace process backed by the support of 63 out of 120 parliament members, of which 5 are Arabs. This means that he will have to look for more coalition partners, all of whom are in the right wing of the political map. This will mean political concessions that will mount more restrictions and obstacles *on the way of the peace process. With this approach,* Peres will not be able to lead.

The international and local atmosphere is so beneficial for an intensification of the peace process that only the determination of Israel's Labour party is needed. Is there such a determination? The first signals were negative, Yasser Arafat the peace partner of Israel who also had to sacrifice a lot for the peace process, whatever our opinion about it is, was not allowed to attend the funeral of Rabin. Preserving the deception of a national unity was preferred to legitimising a peace partner. The Rabin legacy of making peace together with degrading the other partner, as if peace is a favour done to the other and not a common interest, *is still* the dominant political style of the peacemakers. Inviting Arafat to participate would have faced the right wing in Israel with a dilemma. A boycott of Rabin's funeral would have cost them a high political price while marching with Arafat would have demanded an even higher one. The Israeli right was again helped, to avoid its political anachronism, by the limitless opportunism of Labour.

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Kurdish struggle within

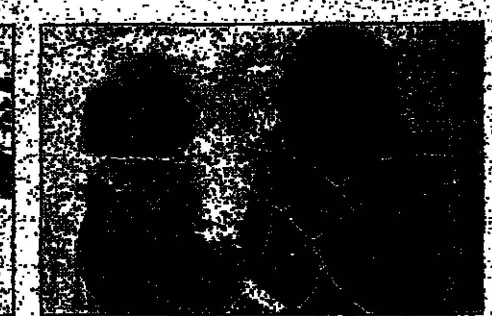
Jalal Al-Talabani, the secretary-general of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, asserted, in an exclusive interview with Amr Abdel-Samie in London, that, for the PUK, Kurdish rights imply a democratic, and not a fragmented, Iraq











The Kurdish question has become the focus of widespread attention in Western political circles. It gained prominence in the aftermath of the Gulf War, when specialists turned to study the options which would arise in a post-Saddam Hussein situation. Only then did the enfeebled nature of the Iraqi regime permit news about the brutalities committed against the Kurds of Iraq to surface.

The latest round of negotiations between the various Kurdish factions, which were held last month in the Irish capital Dublin, failed. Nevertheless, the talks extensively debated the present state of the Kurdish movement and its struggle against the Iraqi regime.

You are a strong advocate of the rights of Kurds in Iraq. For many, though, such rights are synonymous with secession from Iraq. This generates opposition not only from the regime in Iraq, but also from other regional forces which insist that Iraq remain united. How do you see the issue?

The Kurds, who were included in the state of Iraq at the time of its establishment after World War I, have consistently asked for democracy and claimed their national rights.

Their national rights have been incorporated into a multitude of documents. After the establishment of Iraq in 1922, a statement was issued in which both the newly established government of Iraq and the British mandate recognised the existence of the Kurdish government within Iraq, but it failed to determine the need for a federation.

With the outbreak of World War II, the solution to the Kurdish question was envisaged as residing in either self-rule or a federal system. In 1944, Nouri Al-Said, the then prime minister of Iraq, urged the establishment of self-rule. His project, known as *Al-Hilal Al-Khasib* (The Fertile Crescent) envisaged a federation between Syria, Jordan and Iraq which included Kurdistan in Iraq — where Kurds had lived for thousands of years.

During the upsurge of pan-Arabism under Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser, the question of Kurdish self-rule was raised in the context of the projected union between Egypt, Iraq and Syria. A memorandum was presented to Egypt by the Kurdish delegation stating that in the event of a confederation, Kurdistan would be one of its "territories". In the event of a federation, Kurdistan would enjoy self-rule, it said. In 1970, the Baath Party acknowledged Kurdish self-rule.

Kurdish self-rule is a right that was recognised by the entire spectrum of political parties in Iraq — progressivists, Nasserites, communists and Baathists — for a long stretch of time. In fact, the constitution of Iraq, drawn up after the 14 July Revolution, stated in Article Three that Arabs and Kurds were equal partners in the nation, thus recognising the national rights of Kurds.

The Kurdish question therefore is not new, nor was it — as claimed by some — fabricated after the October War or the Gulf War. It is a question which has been concomitant with the establishment of the state of Iraq. Throughout the years, the Kurds have demanded their national rights as part of Iraq. Our struggle has never been aimed at the fragmentation of Iraq.

Kurds have always been the ones to advocate the true unity of Iraq based on democracy. We are the only national entity in Iraq which is making such demands.

Practically speaking, the proponents of pan-Arabism are seeking a system in which the differences within Iraq are assimilated. Islamists claim that there are no boundaries within an Islamic community. The charge that the Kurds are separatists, I believe, is fabricated by certain regional and international forces, particularly extremist Zionist groups, who do not want to see the Iraqis and Kurds living in harmony and growing in power.

Iraq has nothing to fear from the Kurds. The Kurds wish to see a united democratic Iraq. Their eyes are on the model systems of federal Germany, the United States, Canada, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

The Kurdish question today has two fronts. Syria and Iran have polarised the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) under your leadership, and Turkey and the US have polarised the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) led by Masoud Al-Barzani. Do you believe that polarisation has assisted or damaged the Kurdish cause?

We are a people divided between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. We have become linked with the countries we have lived in. Thus, we ourselves initiated ties with Egypt under Nasser in 1956, and our relations with Egypt continued to be strong under President Sadat as well.

Barzani's party, however, had close relations with Iran under the shah and, as a result, the Kurdish question suffered greatly. In 1975, the Shah himself admitted to Mohamed Hassanein Heikal that he had used the Kurdish movement to promote his own interests.

We — members of the PUK — are more inclined to cooperate with the Arabs. When our relations with Egypt were severed, our relations with Syria and President Hafez Al-Assad, and with the Palestinian organisations (which worked with us in 1974-75), were strengthened. We still believe that conditions will not stabilise in Iraq except through Arab-Kurdish solidarity, the termination of the dictatorship and the establishment of a democracy in its place.

Our efforts to reach some agreement with the Iraqi regime have been rejected by Baghdad. We sent a delegation headed by Dr Mahmoud Ali (as representative of all parties) to Tunis to ask Yasser Arafat — on account of his good ties with Iraq — to help solve the Kurdish problem, but again Baghdad rejected the move.

Although we condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, when the Gulf War broke, we halted all hostilities against Iraq. We would not have it said that we were stabbing the Iraqis in the back while they were fighting outside their borders.

However, when the war was over, the Shi'ite *intifada* started in the south and the Kurdish movement gathered pace in the north in efforts to overthrow the dictatorship. The *intifada* was quelled by the Iraqi Republican Guard. This was followed by intensive attacks against us. Prisoners were taken from our ranks and used as guinea pigs for Iraqi experiments with chemical and biological weapons. Thousands died and were buried in the desert. Gripped by fear, many Kurds — estimated at three million — fled to the highlands thus precipitating an international problem. The US became involved in the issue and approved the idea of safe havens. The allies sent some forces to repatriate the Kurds who had been forced to migrate.

In response to Security Council Resolution 688, which contained a reference to the rights of Kurds, the Iraqi government accepted the idea of negotiating with the Kurds. I myself headed the first Kurdish delegation and Barzani headed the second. We met the Iraqi officials and tried to work out some settlement but Baghdad turned down all the reasonable proposals presented.

The government of Iraq had issued a law in 1970 recognising the rights of the Kurds. The law was followed by three more laws to the same effect — to establish self-rule, an executive council and a legislative council for Kurdistan in Iraq. The Iraqi president threatened our delegation, saying that if we failed to accept his terms he would withdraw from the region we consider Kurdistan and leave us to establish our own state. He actually withdrew from the cities of Sulaymaniya, *Shilshman, Argi and Afra, leaving three million* Kurds without a school, a hospital or any municipal services. The government had withdrawn all its civil servants and departments thus forcing on us an economic, cultural and juridical blockade.

There seemed to be no solution before us except to conduct public elections for the legislative council. We established a regional government and instead of calling it an executive government, we called it the Council of Ministers for the Province of Kurdistan. We decided that we were still part of Iraq but in a federal system.

To what extent does Turkish intervention affect the future of the Kurds?

Our relationship with the Turks began during the rule of President [Turgot] Ozal. His perspective was more that of an "Ottoman" than an "Ataturk". For him, the dispute between the Kurds and the Turks was not to be settled by war, but rather by political means. He called on Iraq to turn to democracy and shun its hostility towards the Kurds.

After Ozal, Turkey pursued a policy of cooperation with Iraq and endeavoured to bring Saddam back into the international community.

Turkey adopted a policy of military repression, conceived as the only means of settling the Kurdish problem. The policy encourages opposition to the Kurdish entity within Iraq. In our meetings with the Americans and British, we are not allowed to use the name Kurds. Meanwhile, the Turks consider the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) a terrorist organisation. We do not accept this, because it is one of the most powerful Kurdish parties, mainly based in Turkey. We agree to a peaceful settlement, but in the final reckoning there are some 176 enlightened Turks in prison today because they advocate the peaceful settlement of the Kurdish question.

Our relationship with other Kurds is bad and we keep pelting one another. However, Barzani maintains good relations with Turkey. He is fighting the PKK in agreement with the Turks.

The Turkish press is accusing us of being in a front which includes Syria, Iran and the PKK. But this is not true, because our relations with Syria are not new. As for Iran, we were on bad terms with it until last year. But our relations have improved this year and we are starting to normalise our relations because we opt for good relations with all our neighbours.

The standard line on the Kurds is that they are an element of instability in the region and that they have allowed their internal strife to foil their chances of stability. What are your comments on this?

I reject this claim. We conducted a successful experiment of free elections, and established a national council and a regional government representing all parties. However, the stability created was soon disrupted due to Turkish interference, on the one hand, and the struggle of the Kurds in Turkey and Iran for their rights, on the other.

The Kurdish question will not be settled unless the Kurds in all countries are settled. For security and stability to be established in the Middle East, a suitable solution to the Kurdish question must be found, not by changing the borders, but rather by commitment to three issues: one, democracy; two, human rights as prescribed by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights; and three, some form of self-rule, whether in a federation or confederation, to be agreed upon by the Kurds and the central government.

What are the prospects for inter-Kurdish reconciliation?

Inter-Kurdish reconciliation is very important and has, in fact, made large strides, but it has to a great extent been impeded by regional interference.

We reconciled ourselves with the KDP and things seemed to have been settling down, when war broke out suddenly between that party and the PKK by instigation from Turkey which wanted to destabilise the region.

Stability can only be achieved by Kurdish reconciliation and a hold on foreign interference.

After the failure of the talks in Dublin last month, how do you envisage reconciliation taking place?

The first round of negotiations was successful and ended in a declaration of principles. The second round, however, ended in failure because of the negative role played by Turkey. Its representative, Ahmed Agoud, objected to the presence of a British observer and to the mention of the PKK without the epithet of the "terrorist organisation" responsible for the disturbances in Iraqi Kurdistan, where the party has a stronghold.

Our delegation argued that the instability was caused by the strife between us and the KDP, and that the PKK was not a terrorist organisation but a political organisation, the members of which might commit terrorist acts. We stated that we were in Dublin to bring about reconciliation between the two Iraqi Kurdish parties.

The Turks, however, rejected our view and asked us to choose between them and the PKK, saying that they could bring pressure on the KDP and force it to implement the terms of the agreement. Thus the negotiations failed since the KDP was backed by the Turks.

The US proposed new initiatives in Iraq for collecting arms from the cities, restoring funds to the government treasury, normalising conditions in the regions, concentrating militias in certain centres and monitoring the implementation of the decisions by the Iraqi administration.

We accepted all the proposals except for the paragraph calling for the condemnation of the PKK as a terrorist organisation. The Turks held firmly to this, because they did not want to see inter-Kurdish reconciliation take place under international auspices. They argued that dealing with the Kurdish question as an international issue would constitute the first step towards the establishment of a Kurdish government.

Sheikh Zayed Ibn Sultan of the United Arab Emirates recently demanded the lifting of the blockade on Iraq, arguing that sanctions were only aggravating the suffering of the Iraqi people. What are your reactions to this demand?

I agree with Security Council Resolution 986 imposing partial sanctions on Iraq, thus allowing the entry of supplies of food and medicines and other basic commodities to ward off the danger of famine.

In the latest referendum conducted in Iraq, Saddam Hussein obtained 99.96 per cent of the votes. Do you believe that the results will close the door on any democratic reform in Iraq?

The absurd results are a true reflection of the Iraqi regime which is a dictatorship and does not intend to introduce any change in favour of democracy.

The poll was an exercise in absurdity. Any voter who did not give an affirmative vote was punished by being deprived of food rations and was not paid his salary. In addition, he was liable to be put in prison.

Do you maintain any communication with this individual who towers above the nation?

We believe that dialogue with Saddam Hussein is futile, but we do receive messages from him from time to time.

For example, I received word that Barzan Al-Takriti, Iraq's ambassador to Geneva, opposed the regime in his own way. When I contacted him to inquire further, he reported to his government that I had sent him a special message and the regime sent me the answer. I declared that I had not sent any message to Baghdad but a personal one to Takriti. Thus, it was evident that Takriti was not in the least an opposer of the regime but a full supporter of the dictatorship.

Certain Kurds have attempted to intervene from time to time. One was Dr Makram Talabani who recently came to Kurdistan in an attempt to mediate between us and the Iraqi government. Otherwise, there are no negotiations in the true sense, nor are negotiations anticipated in the near future.

There is some belief that the union that has been achieved between the Iraqi opposition forces is disintegrating. Do you feel that the alliance was established on solid grounds from the beginning?

There are several alliances between the Iraqi opposition, not just one. The main opposition alliance is the National Iraqi Congress (NIC), comprising major Iraqi forces and parties (Kurdish, Shi'ite and Sunni). It has undertaken many activities in Iraq opposed to the government.

You claim that the NIC is the strongest Iraqi opposition, but Mohamed Baqer Al-Hakim and General Hassan Al-Naquib have withdrawn from its governing council leaving only Masoud Barzani and Ahmed Al-Galbi. What are your comments?

No. Al-Da'wa Party withdrew, the Islamic Kurdistani Movement put a freeze on its membership, but others remain. The Supreme Islamic Revolutionary Council (SIRC), the PUK, the KDP, Al-Wifaq Al-Watani and the Islamic Labour Organisation are still active as are several military officers. It is not as outside sources claim.

Other alliances exist as well, namely the National Democratic Movement in Damascus, the Islamic Party in Saudi Arabia and others in Jordan, in addition to individuals such as Salah Al-Mar'ali in London.

The Iraqi opposition is vast and is not in agreement, but this does not mean that it has disintegrated.

How would you explain the recurrence of Arab-Kurdish discord among the ranks of Iraqi opposition after General Hassan Al-Naquib accused the KDP of breaking into his home in Salah Al-Din in northern Iraq? Barzani was also charged with opening channels of communication with the Iraqi regime.

Contacts between Barzani and Saddam are well known by all parties. The Americans are well aware of these contacts. General Hussein Kamel disclosed all the details about this relationship, which did not fall short of the government supplying weapons and artillery to Barzani. The latter has recently received 15 tanks from the Iraqi government.

The continued relationship with Barzani serves the interests of the government and was said by Kamel to have existed since 1991. Barzani had one foot in the opposition and the other in Baghdad. The Iraqi government is supporting him for the purpose of fragmenting the opposition. The search of General Naquib's house and the seizure of his car were invaluable services rendered by Barzani to the government.

Barzani maintains close relations with both Ankara and Baghdad. These are not my words. A British-American delegation reported to their respective governments that there was a secret agreement between Turkey, Iraq and Barzani.

To what extent does the plan of Mohamed Baqer Al-Hakim, the head of the SIRC, for the creation of a civil leadership within Iraq replace the NIC which has been split due to discord among its leaders?

Al-Hakim is an old friend and the PUK which I preside over is closely tied to the SIRC by a cooperative agreement. He does not call for the abolishment of the NIC but for the establishment of a field command consisting of all parties playing active roles.

Iraqi opposition consists of three different elements. First, opposition within the ruling party — the defection of General Rafiq Al-Samara'i, the head of the intelligence centre and the commander of the 116th Division in Kurdistan, and the defection of Lieutenant General Hussein Kamel. Second, in situ opposition among Kurds and Shi'ites in the southern and northern regions, including communists and activists demanding democracy. Third, opposition living overseas in England, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

I agree with Mohamed Baqer Al-Hakim on the establishment of a field command in Iraq to become the nucleus for the opposition front. Those who had rejected the conference will not be deprived of the chance to join the opposition, but will be permitted to work with the new field command as well as with the NIC.

What is your evaluation of the meeting which took place on 3 August between Jeremy Hanley, the British foreign secretary, and the NIC delegation. Did the conference seek to assert its continued role despite the divisions it had endured? Is British support adequate for this purpose?

The conference may have wished for what you implied in your question, but British support is not enough. True opposition is that which emanates from the people. The meeting was designed to assert British support for the conference, since it was claimed that Britain did not support the Iraqi opposition.

Many forces participating in the conference were subject to wide-scale criticism on account of their relationship with certain states or western security organs. What do you think of such criticism?

The criticism is usually made by persons who have been involved with such organs. The Iraqi opposition needs a threefold equation: internal unity, regional support and international support.

The *intifada* has lost because of a lack of international support and we are trying to isolate the dictatorship from regional and international allies. Iraq in the past enjoyed international and regional support. We consider King Hussein's separation from the Baghdad front a real success since it means that Baghdad has lost an important ally in the region.

Questions abound about foreign sources of finance for the Iraqi opposition. How far does the *financing* interfere with the *opposition's* stands?

I believe that the opposition, whether at home or abroad, is seeking to obtain international assistance from Arab and non-Arab sources. I also believe that the recipients of foreign assistance have to coordinate their efforts with those of the donors, since it is a truism that there are no donors who have no selfish purposes.

Have you observed a regional or international consensus for the removal of Saddam?

This is not an easy matter. I remember Kissinger told me at the end of the Bush administration, "We need to remove Saddam, but I am afraid we may be walking in the opposite direction."

However, I am not sure that all the regional forces wish to remove Saddam at the present time. They all might want to see him finished off in the future, but not today.

Syria, for instance, would like an Iraqi replacement rather than an American or an Israeli.

All are confused *except King Hussein who is* clearly endorsing a democratic Iraq, and I believe Israel does not want to see a rapid change.

Do you believe that the US wants a military replacement for the Iraqi regime judging by its inflated interest in the case of the defected lieutenant general, Hussein Kamel?

The US informed us officially through our office in Washington that it gave no importance to the defection of Kamel and does not consider him a potential replacement for Saddam nor for leader of the Iraqi opposition.

However, they see two benefits in his defection: one, that he broke the family circle surrounding Saddam, and two, the valuable *information about* the situation in Iraq.

I would like to add that the defection of Hussein Kamel will encourage many more opposers of the regime from within the ranks of the army.

What are the chances of you cooperating with Hussein Kamel? How does he differ from Samara'i, whose cooperation is solicited by a number of Iraqi opposition factions?

General Samara'i is an old friend, and, when I was head of the Kurdish delegation to Baghdad, he was head of the military intelligence service and we often spoke about opposition to the regime. Therefore, when he was seeking to flee from Baghdad we helped him.

Our relationship with Hussein Kamel, however, was not so good when he was minister of war. In fact there was friction between us during the negotiations. But when he defected, we welcomed him. I do not condemn his defection as others have, because our obligation towards our country dictates that we encourage all elements of the opposition to reunite in a comprehensive national reconciliation and to grant amnesty to all who have committed crimes against our people while they were in power.

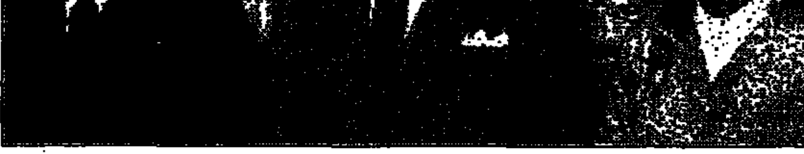
We are duty bound to welcome Hussein Kamel and all who defect from the military or from the regime in Iraq.

Do you think King Hussein has only taken his current position against Saddam's regime because he has a Hashemite plan for Iraq?

Jordan may be envisaging a Hashemite confederation with Iraq. Iran may want it to be part of an Islamic republic. Syria might want to include it in a moderate Baathist regime. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia might want it to be part of some other kind of regime. But for us Iraqis, we want a democratic, independent, united, *pluralistic and federal Iraq.*

Others can have their dreams, it is everybody's right.







Talabani, who stresses Kurdish-Arab solidarity, is seen above with Abdel-Nasser (left) and Sadat (right)

photos: Al-Ahram



Olympian excursions

Hala Halim drinks in the fervour of a festival of Arab poetry held in Greece last week, and seizes the occasion to speak to Iraqi poet Saadi Youssef, this year's laureate of the Cavafy award for Arab poetry



Up at an altitude: the group at the Acropolis. From left: Saadi Youssef, Mohamed Ibrahim Abu Sinna, Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi, Edwar El-Kharrat, Hala El-Badri, Nassar Abdallah, Kostis Moskof, Hassan Telib, Mohamed Ali Ibrahim and Gamal El-Qassas

Amid the sylvan scene

A remark from the guide at the Acropolis Museum to the effect that the mystic smile on the face of ancient Greek statues was unparalleled in ancient Egypt elicited a mild rectification from novelist and critic Edwar El-Kharrat, who drew her attention to a not dissimilar smile common in ancient Egyptian statuary. The enigmatic shadow of a smile on the face of the sphinx and the nuances of correspondences, influences and variances between the two cultures, both in antiquity and in modern times, were to be highlighted in the following days during the encounters of the group of Arab poets and authors visiting Greece.

The array of poets and authors, mostly from Egypt, covered the spectrum of idioms within modern Egyptian and Arab poetry — from the more traditional rhymes of romantics such as Farouk Abu Shousha and Mohamed Ibrahim Abu Sinna (both previous Cavafy award-winners) to the iconoclastic experiments of Gamal El-Qassas and Hassan Telib, passing through the pioneering modernism of Iraqi poet Saadi Youssef. The occasion for the trip was the publication of an anthology of modern Arab poetry translated into Greek by Kostis Moskof, poet and cultural counsellor at the Greek Embassy in Cairo, and organiser of the trip, co-sponsored by the Cultural Section of the Greek Embassy in Cairo and the city of Thessaloniki.

The purpose of the trip, as announced by Moskof on the bus from Athens airport, was to give Arab poetry more exposure in Greece, with the additional hope that local publishers would follow suit and undertake to publish collections of individual poets in translation. To this end, added Moskof, there would be readings (one in Athens, the other in Thessaloniki), and a meeting with Greek publishers had been scheduled. Otherwise, he went on, the programme would include many stops at taverns "that we may see the other". The serendipitous rhythm recalled the Greek origin of the word "symposium": a drinking-party with poetic meditations and repartee, of which there was much. Over the following days, a number of poets from incompatible schools collaborated on a collective poem undertaken in the strictest, most demanding of Arab metrics that some of them had sought to subvert. A lampoon of all the figures present, its composition also constituted a tongue-in-cheek competition.

Several, though not all the poets anthologised, were present. The Egyptian poet Ahmed El-Shahawi and Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish were among those absent. On the other hand, a few poets who read their works in Greece were not represented in the anthology, among them Saadi Youssef, laureate of the 1995 Cavafy award for Arab poetry and Nassar Abdallah, laureate of the 1994 Cavafy award for Egyptian poetry, with Mohamed Sulayman. But both Saadi Youssef and Nassar Abdallah are to be included in the second, expanded, edition of the collection.

The anthology, according to Moskof, sought to be as representative as possible, constituting "an attempt to put the Greek readership in contact with modern Arab poetry". While conceding that, to some extent, the selection from the works of any given poet was dictated by the availability of English or French translations, Moskof defended the otherwise catholic approach: "If you want to be representative, you need to include all the tendencies in poetry, which are not all of equal aesthetic quality." But the concept of poetry at work in the selection appears to have been one that espoused the blurring of boundaries between genres. A case in point is the inclusion of Edwar El-Kharrat who, though a practitioner of the prose poem (whether discrete or within his fiction) is generally tagged as a novelist.

While the poetry readings in Athens and Thessaloniki each had a different ambiance and pattern, the two events were attended by keen, not to mention sizable, audiences. The alternation between readings of the texts in the original by the poets and the Greek translation made for prolonged recitations. But the audience followed closely the consecutive exposure to the musicality of the poem in the original, while to Arabs present it was an occasion to reflect upon the variance in the phonetics of the two languages and the contrast between the conventions of intonation and recitation in the two cultures. Asked after the Athens reading how big the readership of poetry is in Egypt, Hassan Telib smilingly offered: "as big as in this room". Elaborating later, Edwar El-Kharrat expressed pleasant surprise at the fact that the audience at both readings was so responsive to the poets reading in a foreign language, and particularly attentive to recitals by proponents of the new wave, such as Hassan Telib, Gamal El-Qassas and Nassar Abdallah, whose readings at home would draw a far smaller audience. A remarkable instance of poetry reaching across linguistic and cultural confines was Nassar Abdallah's reading in Thessaloniki of a poem characteristic of his "naif" mode that draws on the parable and the fable. His depiction of the reactions of a billy-goat contemplating its mirror image was delivered with each line read first in Arabic then in Greek, which endowed the recital with an appropriately measured rhythm and enabled the audience to follow verse by witty verse before laughter and applause broke out.

If there was a cardinal theme to encounters and debates throughout the trip, it was, naturally, the historical interaction between the two cultures, the leitmotif being the influence of Greek heritage on Egypt. Certain welcome figures were, moreover, invoked — not least Alexander the Great and Cavafy. Alexander was present subliminally, through the associations of the visit to the Macedonian city of Thessaloniki — named after Alexander's half-sister (Moskof was sure to note) and in recent history, twinned for a year with Alexandria. Cavafy was more often invoked by Greeks, being a Greek poet from Alexandria and, more importantly, as a common point of reference, given his poetic universe which infused the Ptolemaic with a modernist sensibility and recast the modern in forms refined by the poets of the Mouseion.

The far reaching impact of Cavafy's poetry on Arab poets dates back to Saadi Youssef's translation in the late 1970s, at that time the most comprehensive. Indeed, Saadi Youssef has, in a number of poems, overtly interfaced with the Alexandrian Greek, as in *Manzil Cavafy* (Cavafy's Residence), which he read in Greece, and *Shagar Ithaca* (Ithaca Trees). It is an intertextual relationship explored at a previous Cavafy symposium by Prof. Ferial Ghazoul of the Department of English and Comparative Literature of the American University in Cairo. Saadi Youssef's was to be the first of many comprehensive translations, most of which were published in Egypt in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Indeed, another instance of intertextuality can be glimpsed in the inclusion of Cavafy in an anthology compiled and translated by Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi (winner of the 1990 Cavafy award for Egyptian poetry). Himself a poet whose text has often addressed the urban experience and alienation within the city, Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi places Cavafy in his anthology, *Mudun Al-Akharin* (Cities of Others), alongside Baudelaire, Lorca, Eliot and others.

A number of answers were offered by the poets to the question most frequently asked of them during the trip — in what way has Greek culture impacted Egyptian literature. When the issue was broached after the Athens reading, Rifaat Sallaam (translator of Yannis Ritsos and 1993 Cavafy award-winner) posited the echoes of Greek mythology in Egyptian poetry and the influence of Cavafy and Ritsos on the more modern poets. While endorsing the mythological connections in Egyptian poetry, laureate of the 1992 Cavafy award, Mohamed Afifi Mattar, elaborated further on the invaluable translations by Arabs in the 8th century of classical Greek works (with the exception of drama and mythology) which, given that some of the originals were lost, safeguarded the texts and enabled the counter-movement of translation later in Sicily and Andalusia, concluding that it was through the Arabs that Europe came to know the heritage of ancient Greece. On a more personal note, Mohamed Afifi Mattar added that he himself was at one point so enamoured with the Athens of Pericles that he tried to study its topography and identify its main landmarks.

What most of the poets agreed on, however, was that the "dialogue" between Greece and Egypt was more of a one-sided affair, citing as evidence the non-existence of Greek translations from Arabic. When asked about the interaction between the two cultures in a television interview, Hassan Telib (laureate of the 1995 Cavafy award for Egyptian poetry) qualified this broad generalisation. Suggesting that Greece in antiquity acquired a great deal of knowledge from Egypt, refashioning and re-introducing it into Egypt, he drew an unfavourable comparison with the current situation. Citing the many translations of Greek literary texts into Arabic, he commented that no parallel movement existed in Greece. Hassan Telib, however, also expressed the reservation that most of the Arabic translations were undertaken through an intermediate language and concluded by recommending more scholarly rigour, lest the whole endeavor of interaction be reduced to mere propaganda.

The paucity of Greek translations of Arabic literature was confirmed in an interview with Constantinos Caroulis, director of letters at the Greek Ministry of Culture. Allowing that Arabic literature translated into Greek was mostly confined to Naguib Mahfouz, Caroulis stated that the focus in translation is from Greek into foreign languages, adding that the Greek Ministry of Culture this year started sponsoring a programme aimed at propagating Greek culture abroad. Seeking to conclude on a more optimistic note, Caroulis spoke tentatively of another programme of bilateral cultural exchange, under the umbrella of which translations from Arabic could be sponsored in future.

The bleak, one-sided image of current cultural interaction between Greece and Egypt was slightly modified in a meeting between the Arab poets and a number of poets from Thessaloniki. On this occasion, Yannis Ifantis (laureate of the 1995 Cavafy award for Greek poetry) and other Salonikan poets spoke of the influence of Sufism and travels to the east on their poetry. These statements evoked an outburst by Saadi Youssef, who prefaced his comments with the question "Which east do you seek? Is it the geographical east, or is it the East of the orientalists?"

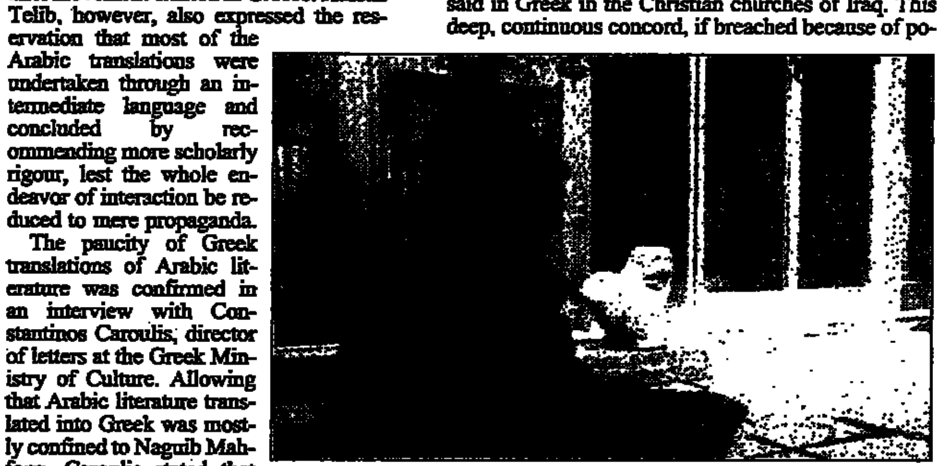
A reading of Ifantis in English translation shows a pursuit of the arcane and the archetypal, a quest mirrored in haiku-like poems (he speaks of the influence of Zen), in the illustrations of mandala-like designs that he draws for his collections, and in the hermetic merging of symbols as of the four beasts of the gospels with the sphinx, "the universal being". "For me", comments Ifantis in terms akin to those of a manifesto, "I read the world as a text, and there is only one book in the world. I read it fanatically, I underline phrases that interest me, jot down notes in the margins and sometimes even draw. And with this work, I try to share with others the horror and the beauty that I read in the book of the world".

At the close of the trip, the words of Hassan Telib at one of the encounters continued to resonate: "Egypt created symbols and riddles, and Greece provided solutions to the riddles — as with the sphinx. But today, the riddles have changed and we need to seek new solutions, together".

Exploring the alleyways

Is the impact of ancient Greek heritage and of Hellenism on modern Iraqi poetry a direct one or is it, as is thought of some of the poetry of Badr Shaker Al-Sayyab, one that has been transmitted through the reformulations of Eliot and other modern European poets?

There is this problematic — that European civilisation rests upon that of Greece and draws upon it...Eliot and others have been influenced in a direct fashion...but for us, I feel that in a sense we are more entitled than Europe to identify with Greek civilisation. The reason, in my estimation, is that European civilisation — meaning Rome — was an occupier and conqueror of the Greeks. As for our region, the situation was totally different. It was in our region that even the Greek conception of Christianity was first formulated, in our region and not in Europe. The Greek conception of Christ is common to both our cultures. The Christ of the Greeks was not Christ as conqueror, or leader of Crusades, as is his other image...I find that I relate more to Greek culture than I do to post-Roman civilisation. To Rome, we were the frontiers of the barbarians, which was not how Greece saw us. This is why I have this sympathy with Hellenism — it is a natural response. Until as recently as the 1950s mass was said in Greek in the Christian churches of Iraq. This deep, continuous concord, if breached because of political reasons, will not be interrupted by the people themselves.



'To Rome, we were the frontiers of the barbarians, which was not how Greece saw us. This is why I have this sympathy with Hellenism — it is a natural response'

You were among the first to translate Cavafy and Yannis Ritsos into Arabic. Would you elaborate on your choice of two Greek poets of such widely divergent idioms.

I worked on these two translations a long time ago. No one took much of an interest in their work at the time. I was aware of a Greek modernist revival in poetry and felt it necessary for us to come into contact with it, given the common links — particularly the historical ones. The efforts exerted to modernise the Greek poem by the poets of a nation so close were very relevant to us in a stage of our history which had similarities with theirs. I was always following closely the struggle of the Greek people, in all its aspects and phases. One of the main incentives in translating Ritsos was the fact that he is a leftist poet, that was part of what made it a priority to translate him. As for Cavafy, my intention was to present a faithful picture of modern Greek poetry, thus broadening the horizon. To seek to present Ritsos, a communist poet, did not suffice even me, a communist poet. I wanted to present the image of the people in that country [Greece]. Cavafy, in a sense, is the antithesis of Ritsos — in his idiom, in his reading of history. However these two antithetical poets are complementary, in both life, poetry, and in seeking to present the identity of Greek people. I translated the two poets in the late 1970s. I translated about 120 poems by Cavafy. The rest of his poems it was not feasible to translate, since they were based on word-play and puns. I consider that the poems I translated are, more or less, all the poems it is possible to render into Arabic.

All of Cavafy appeals to me, every poem. And there is, of course, the Cavafy of folklore — such popular poems as "The City" and "Waiting for the Barbarians"... He is a poet of moments of decline, a tenebrous poet. Part of his genius lies in choosing the peripheral, the forgotten, the silenced — the exiled, the ambivalent figures; this is what he works on... Most of his material is on the Greeks of Magna Grecia, not on Greece of the mainland — the Ptolemaic period and the Byzantine. But he does not write historical poems; he writes an altogether modernist poem. His material can be historical or otherwise — it can be from the alleys of modern Alexandria or from the alleys of Greek history. In any case, he always works on the alleys.

Twenty years on [after the two translations], I find that the influence of the two poets has become part of the fabric of the Arab poem, and has had a great impact on young poets. This is something I am very proud of. I feel I have been instrumental in making possible, in the past two decades, the influence of Ritsos and Cavafy. It was part of my mission to open up new and important sources for young poets — instead of us drawing on the same water from the same well.

When in an encounter between Arab poets and Greek poets from Thessaloniki a few days ago, a few Salonikan poets spoke of the strong influence of Sufism and of visits to the East on their work, your response was one of total disavowal.

Sufism, Islamic Sufism, has a certain limit, a certain ceiling, that ceiling being God. Thus it is a mysticism of narrow intellectual scope. As for the expressions of it — the way it was articulated by Ibn Arabi, Al-Hallaj, Al-Nifari — these were formulations, but under a low ceiling. We do not have a mysticism beyond the theocentric. It is always associated with the godhead.

I contrast it with Buddhism, and with Confucianism. And when I compare, I find it very limited. The other reason [for my response to the Salonikan poets] is that the yearning for affiliation to the East [experienced by them], in reality, is not for the East as in the model of Japan, but of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt. It is an east that has obvious features of being underdeveloped. We want to emerge from this underdevelopment, rather than uphold it as an ideal status quo. Why should we not step into the 21st century and become part of the advanced, industrial world, with developed societies? Why not step into an age where democracy is common to all but us? No, I feel that this talk of returning to the East makes a mockery of us, or else it shows a naiveté on the part of the other which assumes that we shall be flattered.

You shall be coming to Alexandria in a week's time to receive the Cavafy award. How do you relate to the city?

My first visit to Alexandria was in the 1950s. Since then I have often re-visited it, and now make sure that my stays in Cairo are protracted so that I can spend more time in Alexandria. I always wander around in Alexandria exploring by myself, in the streets. So it was, for example, that I found, on my own, Cavafy's house, before it was turned into a museum. I had read the address somewhere — Lepsius Street. I asked around and found out that the name of the street was now Sharm Al-Sheikh. There was the porter who slept in the room [of the flat which was then a pension], and complained about the frequent visitors. I said, but please let me see the room. He opened the door... and there was no furniture left of Cavafy's original flat except for a table that was later put in the Cavafy Museum. When I visited the flat after it became a museum, things had changed. I felt very happy to find one of my translated poems [*Manzil Cavafy* (Cavafy's Residence)] framed and hanging in the museum. I had written the poem as if I was writing about the house of an intimate friend. It was the surprise of the place. Had I visited the museum, there would not have been this surprise [recorded in the poem]. But when I first went to the flat, in its original condition, I felt I was visiting a friend.

Your most recent works have been seen as a break with past experiments. How would you describe the features of your new approach?

The rudiments of what I am now doing can be traced four years back. How to write a text using raw language, what I call concrete language, using only the noun and the proper noun. I use the noun as a slab of unquarried rock. I work with a collection of these nouns. This is what I am working on, and of course it is not easy, because there is so much diction that you sacrifice in the process... the adjectives and so on. I have imposed this strict prosody on myself. It's a siege I have imposed on myself... It's a process that appears very easy but is very complex and produces very complex results. On the other hand, I do not feel I have done anything new. What I have done is merely to recuperate to poetry its primary elements — the way writing should be — to return to the initial with which the artist tackled his material. This, simply, is what I am trying to do — to use language at its most raw.

The Fifth Cavafy International Symposium opens in Cairo on 11 November at the Al-Hanager Arts Centre, Opera Grounds, at 8 pm. From 12 to 14 November, the symposium will continue at the premises of the Hellenic Foundation in Alexandria, 18 Sidi Al-Metwalli Street, downtown. For further information, call: (03) 4821598

Plain Talk

Last week witnessed a series of events organised by the Binational Fulbright Commission, commemorating 46 years of the implementation of its programme in Egypt. To underline the importance of the occasion Mrs Harriet Fulbright, wife of the founder of the Fulbright programme, arrived in Egypt to share the celebrations with the commission and its alumni.

At the annual alumni dinner Ambassador Edward J Walker read a special message from President Clinton. Other guests, including Dr Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin, Dr Anne Radwan and Mrs Fulbright were also present on the occasion of the inauguration of the commission's new office on 6 November.

Such celebrations evoke the memory of a man with a vision, who saw in cultural and educational exchanges among the peoples of the world a means of achieving peace and mutual understanding. It was in 1946 that, as a senator, he laid down the details of the programme, announcing that the programme would be an antidote to the epidemic of global violence.

In his own way Senator Fulbright was a revolutionary, one who believed that attitudes would change only through the promotion of understanding and sympathy and not through the use of force. It comes as no surprise that he spoke strongly against the "Bay of Pigs" and the Vietnam War.

He was one of the first to be concerned with the improvement of long-term cultural relations among countries who wished to transcend political, military and ideological barriers.

In the light of the present state of affairs, where the interdependence of peoples constitutes an important aspect of the life of nations, Fulbright's earnest desire to ameliorate educational and cultural exchanges seem indispensable.

In Senator Fulbright's own words: "The programme aims to bring a little more knowledge, a little more reason, and a little more compassion into world affairs and thereby increase the chance that nations will learn at last to live in peace and friendship."

After World War II, he realised what an important role mutual understanding could play in maintaining peace among nations. During his long term as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he tried arduously to inculcate his vision of peaceful co-existence among nations. In this respect, he was a forerunner of Nehru and other leaders of the non-aligned movement.

Judging by the thousands the world over who have benefited from Fulbright activities, one realises how successful the programme has been: 4000 scholars have benefited in Egypt alone.

In *The Arrogance of Power* and *The Price of Empire*, two books by the senator, Fulbright rearticulates the arguments of the anti-war lobby; a lobby that eventually succeeded in promoting the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. It was also the Fulbright lobby that forced a change in power in the US. It gave the Congress stronger prerogatives as far as foreign policy was concerned and curtailed the power of the presidency.

He opposed US interference in the internal affairs of other nations. In *The Price Of Empire*, he tackled the problems of the Middle East. He strongly opposed the Israeli occupation of Sinai and other Arab lands and called for immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops to pre-1967 borders. He deplored the fact that Israel and the Jewish lobby dictated American foreign policy.

His great achievements in regards to education and cultural exchanges are, ironically, the reason why one tends to forget his important contributions in the field of international politics. Yet in all that he did, in both domains, he was a great believer in our common humanity.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Poem

'Kingdom IV'

Mohamed Sulayman

The Cavafy Prize, awarded annually to a distinguished Egyptian poet, and the International Symposium accompanying it, have become awaited cultural events by poetry lovers. For critics and scholars, they are occasions to analyse and discuss Cavafy and his poetics, the range of Egyptian-Greek literary relations as well as the nature and typology of acculturations, influences and correspondences.

Poetic kinship with the great Greek Alexandrian poet Cavafy can be sensed in such varied literary works as *Waiting for the Barbarians* by the South African novelist JM Coetzee and "Ithaca Trees" by the Iraqi poet Saadi Youssef. But the impact of Cavafy does not stop at his memorable lines and images. It goes beyond the imprint of his own poetic corpus to reach for enclosed spaces which he unlocked for poets. He opened up areas of poetic discourse that had remained unverbalised or hardly touched upon, thus making it possible to explore hidden corners of the human psyche and experience. Cavafy lyricised impossible passions, ephemeral intimacies, and the love that dare not speak its name — as Oscar Wilde put it. The ecstatic experience, which carries within it a terrifying beauty and the seeds of its own destruction, was sung so movingly by Cavafy. The context of such complex desires could only be a city, with its glamour and squalor, its promise and indifference.

This criss-crossing of passion with doom, the erotic with the tragic, is also encountered — albeit in a different key — in the poetry of the Egyptian poet Mohamed Sulayman, awarded the Cavafy Prize in 1994 and who is presently a fellow at Iowa University's Program for International Writers. Sulayman came from Menufiya Governorate to Cairo to study pharmacy in the sixties — a decade that witnessed the height of revolutionary fervour as well as the collapse of the national project that sought to establish an independent and prosperous country. The military defeat of 1967 was a turning point in Arab aspirations; it pushed intellectuals and artists to probe into the reasons that led to the defeat of a popular dream. Mohamed Sulayman's poetry is permeated with such soul-searching. His volumes of poetry portray the agonies, dreams and fluctuating moods of an artist in a post-revolutionary phase. Sulayman depicts the joy and despair or urban life, the hopes and doubts, the frenzies and fears of a postcolonial ethos.

The ambivalence of emotions in the poetry of Sulayman, unlike those of Cavafy, do not spring from an inner conflict that consumes the poet, but from the inconsistencies of social existence and the contradictory demands made on the individual. In a poem entitled "Kingdom IV" in his volume *Solomon Rex* (1990), Sulayman depicts a passionate and an uninhibited encounter between a foreign woman and a native male persona. Powerful as the relationship is, a sense of doom intercepts it. The poem is marked by Biblical imagery from the "Song of Solomon" as well as allusions to Qur'anic references to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, who was announced by the hoopoe and then brought to Solomon in a split second by the jinn. The two Arabic consonants mentioned in the poem, "Jeem" and "Nuun", constitute the word "jinn" in Arabic.

Like Cavafy, Sulayman (whose name is the Arabic form of Solomon) uses the sacred and the legendary to evoke present and existential concerns, and like Cavafy, he depicts elations that are by their very nature doomed. The sensibilities of both poets are similar, but the contexts are wide apart. There is no influence that one can detect, no intertext that one can comfortably point to, but there is a correspondence that justifies the notion of poetic affiliation.

Introduced and translated by **Ferial J Ghazoul**

A radiant foreigner
Stole away from the Nordic blue
Across the sea.
She walked into his cafe
Nestled to his healing name
At his feet she threw her robe
Crown
And the peaceful country
Her back was dotted with freckles
Her breasts: two pomegranates
And fire beneath the skin
But the tongues were at variance
His throne was of fronds
His robe filled with grass
His hand empty
He was drowsing on his drugged staff
Having thrown his pouch behind his back
When she arched herself like a cat
Then leapt
Empowered by a storm-body
She knelt down
She prostrated
Wrapping herself with his on-fire-flesh
She bent over him
Licked with her eyes and tongue
She twirled and stormed
In the darkness
She turned into a cake rounding a pole
And in her space
He discharged peace
Crushing the grass which blocks the palace gate
Then perforating the wall
Upwards and downwards
Blessing the garden
Shaded with his towering fountain.
In his cafe
The hoopoe was still astray
Rehearsing a nocturnal tale
Or gathering letters from a cavern
Putting the letter Nuun
Next to the letter Jeem
Or blocking a road by a road
Perhaps the jinni is still swimming and searching
And perhaps...
But I see the foreigner becoming a road
And a dome for the falcon's nap
Will she remain under his feathers
To be deflowered at night
In the morning
And at high noon which drives the steeds of heat?
Or will she suddenly long for the sea
And the coldness sedimenting in its depths?
Perhaps she will age
Or he will age
Winter may leap into the tale
And nomadism may insert its teeth
She may become the end of the record
Or its opening.

Ways of escape

The rich and famous have traditionally escaped to the Bahamas or other such expensive heavens. Egyptian artists and intellectuals do not yearn for faraway horizons but do enjoy a hideout tucked away somewhere in the countryside. In an occasional series, *Al-Ahram Weekly* will find out where, away from the madding crowds, those in search of inspiration retreat





photos: Salah Ibrahim

House of dreams

Azza Fahmy's appreciation of the Islamic tradition, reflected in her work, is also evident in her home. She has had the courage to implant the absurd: far from the pollution and the skyscrapers, the glass cages and the tiered wedding cakes, her villa is unique. She has fled from the noisy city to Al-Harraniya, where the four-storey villa stands on a square kilometre of verdant landscape. **Nermeen El-Nawawi** was invited to visit

"I chose Islamic architecture because I am infatuated with Islamic traditions," Fahmy says. Through friends like Abdel-Ghani Abul-Enein and Ra'aya El-Nimr who have applied their work on Egyptian folklore to areas as diverse as the creation of costumes for dance troupes and the establishment of a folklore museum, she came to appreciate traditional clothes — she dresses almost exclusively in *galabiyas* — to eat off copper plates, to turn away from Eurocentrism to a way of life more consistent with the surroundings. "It was natural that I chose to live in a traditional house where I can express my love of the Islamic heritage," is how she puts it. In doing so Fahmi was following a trend established in the 60s or even before by the Wissa Wassefs who had discovered the unique experience of living and working near the Pyramids in the now famous little village of Al-Harraniya.

Ten years ago, Fahmy bought a piece of land in Al-Harraniya. Her ex-husband, engineer Nabil Ghali, designed the villa according to her vision. Fahmy moved in 1990. The realisation of the dream did not come cheap: excluding the price of the land and the *collection of furniture and artwork inside, the villa* cost half a million.

Creatively designed and furnished, Fahmy's home conveys her love of art, crafts, and different styles of furniture. The great effort and expenditure involved in building and furnishing the villa cannot be doubted. Every item is unique. "I *collected all* sorts of antiquities from every place I went to," Fahmy says.

The house overlooks the fields separating Al-Harraniya from the Giza Pyramids. It has two big halls, four large bedrooms, five bathrooms, two kitchens, six terraces, a storage room and a recreation area. Fahmy affirms that all the construction materials and furnishings were bought in Egypt. "I mainly depended on collecting old things," Fahmy said. She did not depend on someone else's taste, or ready-made instructions from magazines and DIY manuals: "That wasn't necessary because I am originally an interior designer."

Enclosed by a white brick wall, the villa is approached by a narrow entrance. On the left of the entrance are two spacious halls, colourful Harraniya rugs and carpets scattered on the white marble floors. The white ceilings are lined with dark brown mashrabiya, through which residents of the upper floors can peek down onto the halls. Separating the two halls is a 90-year old fountain recycled for modern use, made of white stones taken from the Muqattam *quarries and dotted with small squares of black* marble; water drips gently down, echoing softly in the inner courtyard. The couches are recycled from old mattresses covered with colourful rag-rug slipcovers. Several floor cushions are scattered on the floor beside the couches, inviting the inhabitants to settle comfortably on *the* floor. *Indirect light*, from clay and porcelain wall lamps, suffuses the halls.

On the second floor, *mashrabiya* screens afford a view of the two main halls and the sprawling fields of the village. The dark wood and upholstery are cozy without being overwhelming; shelves housing books, manuscripts and magazines line one entire wall. A large ceramic fireplace, with designs copied from the ceramic collection at the Islamic museum, promises warm winter nights; the copper chandelier sheds a warm golden light.

Fahmy's treatment of the bedrooms is cool, elegant and heavily stylised. All four bedrooms overlook the Giza Pyramids. Each bedroom is made up of three areas — articulated rather than divided — for sleeping, sitting and dressing, in addition to a bathroom adjoining the master bedroom: cool tiles and wrought-iron shelves. In the sleeping areas are sprawling wooden beds with side tables: plenty of room for a lamp, a few books and a glass of water within easy reach. Built-in cupboards in the dressing areas face mirrors which take up the opposite wall. The sitting *areas are simple but functional: large sofas in* arabesque style, and more *tabliyas*: antique copper trays on wooden folding stands.

In the bathrooms, Fahmy has achieved stunning visual effects through the use of coloured glass panes, designed *by Hag* Ibrahim Abdel-Moneim, recipient of the Agha Khan award; a French designer made the ceramics. The domed roofs are set with circles of glass which let the light through in pale circles of colour, reminiscent of a Turkish bath.

Behind the villa is a large green area, with fruit and vegetable patches tended by the family: "This cultivation does not make us self-sufficient, but it is an interesting hobby," Fahmy laughs. In the early mornings, the peaceful atmosphere encourages meditation; but in the afternoons and evenings, the garden can be dotted with lamps for informal gatherings.

Paradise? Not quite, says Fahmy. Even an oasis of calm needs upkeep. Strangely enough, the return to traditional architecture and decor — on a more costly and elaborate level — does not entail a correspondent shift in lifestyle. Getting away from it all may be easy, but staying there is not: "The maintenance is very *difficult*."

Yet the domes, arches, lattice screens and different levels used throughout the house are the perfect set for a movie, or a day of dreaming: a wonderful montage, a way to escape.



One-way ticket

Waiting for a taxi just before three o'clock in the afternoon can be a trying business. I am late, *somewhere* in Heliopolis — I am not quite sure where. All I know is that I have to go to the Saraya Al-Qubba metro station. From there I am on familiar ground.

Taxis are all choc-a-block full of school children: the situation looks desperate... Where are those children's parents? Aren't they supposed to drive them back and forth in the comfort of their own cars? *I should remember not to* uphold the right of women to work so fiercely...

An empty taxi finally skids to a stop. It looks set for its last voyage: unbelievably battered, its wheels animated with a life of their own. Do I have a choice at twenty past three? No, I don't. Nor do I complain when I find out that the back door is hopelessly jammed. Although one of my golden rules is always to ride in the back of cabs, I will have to break it. The driver is honking impatiently, his eyes rolling dangerously. I hurry to get in next to him. The springs of the seat poke me cruelly in the back. No matter. This is no time for physical comfort. I have to get to Saraya Al-Qubba. The taxi proceeds in *rough leaps and bounds*, zapping through traffic then jerking to a dead stop.

"Are you in the fire brigade?" asks the driver, narrowly avoiding collision with a bus-full of children. I unclench my teeth just enough to whisper "No, why?" "The trousers" he says briefly, whizzing through a set of red lights. He is now staring at me in the most unnerving way. I wish he would keep his eyes on the road. "Leather," he coughs, then spits out of the window. A fat woman screams at him. I gather that he has spat on her foot. "Go back to the fields, fat cow," he shouts at her.

He spots a taxi full of school children. There is another one, similarly loaded, on his left. *"That's what we are good at," he chants in a* peculiar sing-song tone: "making children and then more children. And children go to school and all schools come out at the same time...." — he narrowly misses a tiny boy weaving his way through traffic — "together with all the employees of the republic, so that they can all make a big traffic jam together." I have been noticing smoke coming out of the cab's hood. Should I tell him? I'd better not. He might get started on the fire brigade business.

"Do you like music?" he suddenly hollers over the motor's din. "Where is the metro station," I demand to know in a toneless voice. He points straight ahead, while fiddling with a tape that must have been retrieved from a garbage heap, then takes a sharp left. We are now in an almost deserted alley. "Now," I think in a panic, checking the location of the door handle, "I will leap out now." But what shall I do with the books I am carrying? Leave them behind?... No way.

"What is the matter with you, don't you like music?" He seems concerned, staring at me. Too busy planning my escape, I had not noticed. Now I hear the sound of cheese grilling — the smell too. He is singing along. "I am a good driver," he informs me as if sharing a secret. "A very good one. Otherwise I would have gone mad long ago." He could have fooled me. We are back in the worst traffic ever with buses on every side. "You should not go out at this time of day," he says in confidence. "Two is fine, four even better. I will drive you any day at four o'clock. I never take a fare at three, this is the time when I rest. I just felt sorry for you, carrying those books. And the leather pants. You *sure you aren't in the fire brigade?*"

More zapping, more jerking, this is never going to end. It is almost four o'clock.

"Where is the station?" I ask as firmly as I can. He looks offended. "Hey, Madame, don't you trust me?" I had better not answer this one. "Here is the station, don't be upset, I was just trying to take you through quiet streets." He has stopped, and there, just in front, is the metro station. Not Saraya Al-Qubba, to be sure — in fact, it is Ain Shams, five stops in the wrong direction — but who cares?

I hand him ten pounds and prepare to run. "Hey, wait!" he says. This is another one of my bad days. He carefully counts out eight pounds and pushes them into my hand. "The detour is on me," he says grandly. "It was a pleasure, Madame."

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Fillo pastry with minced meat

Ingredients:

1/2 kilo of ready made *fillo*
1/4 kilo minced meat (cooked)
2 eggs
1 1/2 cups of milk
salt & pepper
butter

Method:
Slightly smear a rectangular oven pan (size of the *fillo*) with butter. Place half the *fillo* pastry in the pan, then spread the minced meat on top. Place the rest of the *fillo* on top of the meat, then with a sharp edged knife, cut into squares reaching the bottom of the pan. Preheat the oven then melt 2 tbps. of butter and sprinkle them on top of the *fillo* pasty squares, moving the pan to and fro in order to spread the melted butter. Place pan in the preheated oven until top is slightly golden, then remove. Beat the eggs and season and mix them with the milk after warming it. Pour over the *fillo* pastry and bake in the oven until top is golden. Serve as snacks or as a side dish.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Steaks for the heart

Nigel Ryan *on a treat for the carnivore*

Le Bistro has been reviewed in this column already, but that was over a year and a half ago. Since then the restaurant has been closed for several months for renovation. Last week I visited the newly opened restaurant twice, which might seem excessive. It was, as always, excess in the call of duty.

Gone are the strangely upholstered one-armed chairs to be replaced by Swiss-chalet type seating painted pale blue. Otherwise the interior is more or less the same, newly painted but unremodelled. The menu has undergone a similar *process to the interior* — freshly, *much more* smartly printed, it has, more or less, remained the same. Thankfully, it is a little more extensive than before. It is also a little more precise.

First visit: I ordered medallions of beef with a wild (!) mushroom sauce, my partner, sea bass. Now how you hope to find wild mushrooms in Egypt I don't know. Supply networks are not so *advanced. It came as no surprise*, then, *that the* mushrooms were as domesticated as ever. Not a hint of wildness. The meat, as always at Le Bistro, was excellent, cut from a fillet, and served rare. It is not overstating the case to say that Le Bistro's butchers supply some of the best meat in Cairo. The fish, unfortunately, is another matter. Though the creme and vinegar sauce was *fine, the sea bass was certainly nothing to write* home about. If only the proprietors of Le Bistro could find a fish-monger to match their meat supplier it would be a difficult place to beat.

First visit began with two salads, one mozzarella and tomato, the other just plain green. The former had a fine basil and olive oil dressing, the latter was fresh and well presented, though ingredients could be a little more imaginative. The bill, for two people, who enjoyed a more than ample lunch, was just under LE 60.

Second visit opened with a much more successful fishy theme — salade de la criée and a tuna and white haricot bean salad. The first consisted of strips of sea bass cooked with onions, garlic, a little tomato and finely chopped olives, served with garlic bread. It really was — and in my experience at Le Bistro, always has been — very successful. I must confess to being no lover of the haricot bean. However, those more inclined towards the bean than myself pronounced *the second salad good.*

These were followed by tournedos in a red wine sauce, sea-bream in a mustard based sauce served with rice, and veal sausage with brown onions and rosti potatoes. Left to play the leading role the fish was no better than it should have been. The sausage was rather disappointing though the rosti potatoes were OK. And again *the meat came out on top*, providing *an* annoying reminder that perhaps I should change my butcher.

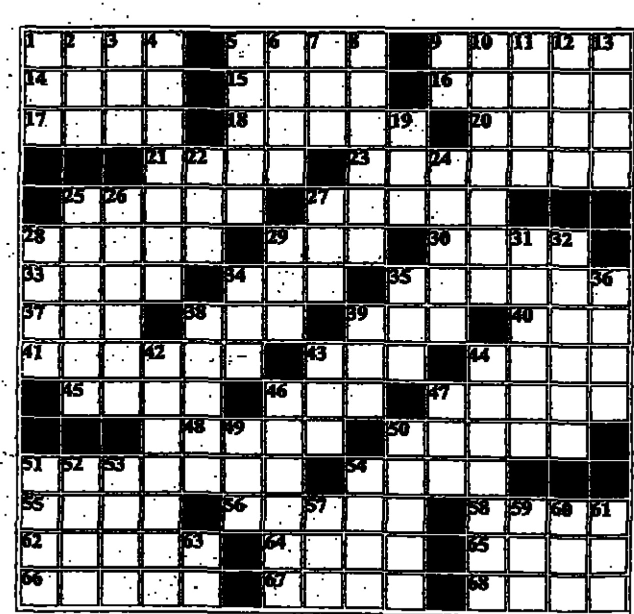
Three people, one of whom drank beer, had a perfectly pleasant lunch for under LE 100. On both days the entrees were served with cabbage, sweated with butter and garlic and served crisp. Le Bistro is, in my experience, one of the few *restaurants in Cairo that takes its own marketing* seriously. One need never fear the appearance of the all too ubiquitous carrots and courgettes. They pay far more attention to what is available in the market to fall back on anything quite so tedious. And so Le Bistro came up trumps. Sensible food, more than reasonably priced.

Le Bistro, Hoda Sharawi, Downtown.

Al-Ahram Weekly

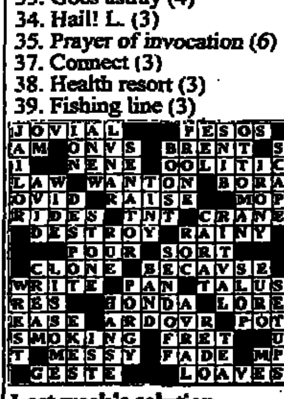
Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



Across
1. Slender (4)
5. Scheme (4)
9. Over (5)
14. Bad mannered (4)
15. Get up (4)
16. Claw of bird of prey (5)
17. Sometimes it describes fiscal or solar (4)
18. Assault (5)
20. Lot (4)
21. A garment (4)
23. Distributes (7)
25. Elk (5)
27. Exhausted, 2 wds. (5)
28. Biblical Eastern wiseman (5)
29. Spanish cheer (3)
30. ... cava, Anatomy (4)
33. Goes astray (4)
34. Hail! L. (3)
35. Prayer of invocation (6)
37. Connect (3)
38. Health resort (3)
39. Fishing line (3)
40. Forepart of a hoof (3)
41. Put fodder in silo (6)
43. Taxi (3)
44. Devastation (4)
45. Weather initials (4)
46. Culinary utensil (4)
47. Fictitious tales (5)
48. Precious stone (5)
50. Younger son (5)
51. Memoranda (7)
54. Prefix denoting "one of two sides" or "a half" (4)
55. Fragrance (4)
56. Seed-coat (5)
58. Approach; arrive (4)
62. Biblical lawgiver (5)
64. Bohea and Pekoe (4)
65. At once (4)
66. Winter vehicle, pl. (5)
67. Skin disease (4)
68. Soft malleable base metal (4)

Down
1. Essay (3)
2. Tint (3)
3. Miss Lupino (3)
4. Fidgety (7)
5. Form of writing (5)
6. Soft fluff material for dressing wounds (4)
7. Moke (3)
8. Provoke (6)
9. Prep. of location (2)
10. Small bowl (7)
11. Evil smelling (4)
12. Elect (4)
13. Weather directions (4)
22. Snaky letter (3)
24. Very bright (5)
25. Naval (6)
26. Folkloric monster (6)
27. Beer (3)
28. Boundary (4)
29. Eggs (3)
31. Cosmos (6)
32. Sanctify with oil (6)
34. Impersonate (3)
35. Run clumsily (3)
36. Long for (4)
38. Snow and rain together (5)
39. Workman who refuses to join colleagues in strike (3)
42. Wounds (7)
43. Depression in mountain-lake (3)
44. Naturally inherent (7)
46. Spanish monetary unit (6)
47. Sweet potato (3)
49. Moisten (3)
50. Desist (5)
51. Mothers, sl. (4)
52. Sacred cow (4)
53. Pry (4)
54. Laurel's Christian name (4)
57. Describing certain wines (3)
59. Item (3)
60. New Zealand extinct bird resembling ostrich (3)
61. Goal (3)
63. WWII Nazi member (2)



Last week's solution

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

106

From animal power to steam to electricity — that was the evolution of the driving force in Egypt's 132-year-old tramway system. When electric-powered tramways began running in 1896, the people greeted them with mixed feelings ranging from approval to surprise, confusion, scepticism and, at the other end of the spectrum, outright opposition. A few tramways still run in Cairo and Alexandria, but they are a dying species. Most have been phased out. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizq** tells the story as he saw it through the eyes of *Al-Ahram*

At exactly 4am on 13 August 1896, the first "electric tramway" in Egypt's history set off to inaugurate the tramway line from Ataba Square to Mohammed Ali Street and from Ataba Square to Boulaq. Travelling in the *first carriage* was *His Excellency* Fakhri Pasha, minister of public works, accompanied by some of his colleagues and employees in the ministry. Guests in the other carriages included many other officials and dignitaries. Ataba station was splendidly decorated for the occasion of the electrical-powered tramway's *trial* run, which was a great success. "Other lines will be inaugurated over the coming days, may God spare this most beneficial project from harm or mishap," wrote *Al-Ahram* at the time.

While 13 August 1896 may have marked the birth of the "electric tramway" in Egypt, the history of its evolution began much earlier. We pick up the first thread of this story with the introduction of rail transportation in 1825, when George Stevenson founded the first railway line in England. Rapidly the steam-powered trains, originally intended to move coal, developed into a large inter-city transport service for passengers, goods and produce. It would be several years before the use of rail within the cities would be conceived.

Then we move to New York City where, in 1858, John Francis Tram established the city's first inner-city railway. London would follow three years later. Nevertheless, these tramways were run, not on electricity, but on animal power, particularly horses, and would continue to be so for some time. Even so, there were plenty of justifications for the novelty. Asphalt paving had not yet been invented, and the railway lines provided a smoother and more stable course for the carriages than dirt roads ever could, however assiduously tended. The lines also helped regulate the flow of traffic and provided a degree of regularity and punctuality as yet unknown in urban public transportation. In fact, the very name "lines" as applied to any mode of transportation continues to convey a *sense of precision and* dependability up to the present day.

Egypt never lagged far behind in the development of rail transport. It, too, experienced the transition from the horse-powered to steam-powered to the electric-powered tram that was put into operation on 13 August 1896. In fact, horse-powered tramways made only a limited appearance in Egypt.

From 8 January to 22 August 1863, Alexandria's first tramway consisted of four carriages drawn by four horses along the route from Ramla Station to the "Residence of Sheikh Ismail" (now Bulkeley Station). Afterwards the four horses were replaced by a steam powered locomotive.

We read in *Al-Ahram* of another "steam-powered tramway". Commissioned by supreme decree on 27 January 1896 to operate between Al-Mansoura and Al-Manzala, its first segment running between Al-Mansoura and Al-Matariya was completed by June of that year, "after appropriating the necessary land through proper legal procedures," as *Al-Ahram* noted.

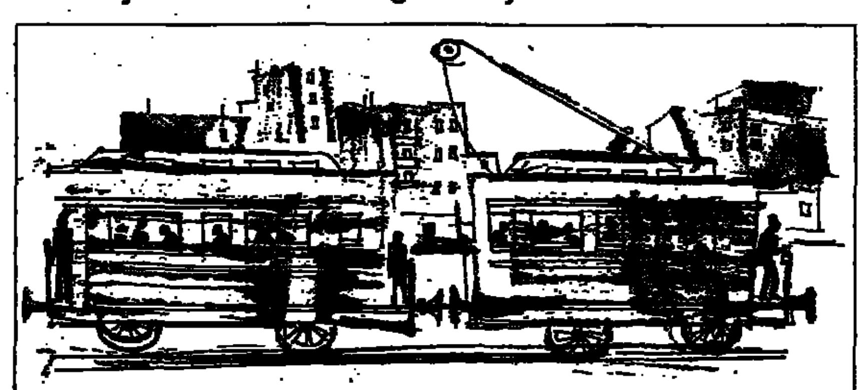
A news item in 1895 announces plans to build a tramway line in Port Said. Unfortunately, the article makes no mention of whether the tram was to be powered by steam or electricity, and the newspaper did not follow up on the story. We learn from other sources, however, that the line was in fact put into operation. It was 12 kilometres long and consisted of 29 cars drawn by horses. We also learn of another line in Zifta which had three iron carriages and 12 wooden carriages for transportation of passengers and the mail. In the cotton season, however, the train was used to convey this crop to and from the cotton mills in the city.

The above were the precursors of Cairo's electric tram, although it took 10 years for this project to see fruition. In 1887 a company applied for a concession "to put a tramway into operation in all important streets of Cairo". *Al-Ahram* urged the government not to refuse, pleading that the project "would bring us great advantages". The plea fell on deaf ears in the Ministry of Public Works which rejected the proposed tramway on the grounds that "it would disrupt the sources of income of cart and animal owners".

In Alexandria, however, the company's petition to construct a tramway system in that city received a more favourable response. As we learn from *Al-Ahram* of 28 November 1887, a committee was formed to *review the* petition. *It* gave *its* approval on the condition that the company "repair the roads and sewers over which the tramway lines will pass and pay a fixed sum of money as a guarantee that it will fulfil its commitments." Apparently, the conditions were too stiff, for the company abandoned its project.

At the beginning of the 1890s the Belgian-owned Cairo Tramway Company was formed. The new company petitioned to the Ministry of Public Works for the concession to operate a tramway system in Cairo, powered for the first time by electricity. Evidently, the company encountered some difficulties, for we next learn from *Al-Ahram* that the matter ended before the Egyptian courts. "Scandal!" reads a headline in the newspaper's 17 March 1898 edition, and *Al-Ahram* would not have chosen such a sensational word if the matter did not merit it. The case against the company was brought by a Monsieur Egeon, formerly the company's broker. *Monsieur de la Hue*, director of the company, used M. Egeon to appropriate the land for the project, and then dispensed with his services. The latter had prepared for that eventuality by stealing some company papers that proved corruption. The evidence was damning, for we read in *Al-Ahram* that M. de la Hague "bribed *numerous senior of*ficials with sums up to LE4,000, had a fictitious employee on a large salary, invented names of members of the pricing commission and other such crimes too loathsome to enumerate, although it only remains to be said that the recipients of the bribes were for*eign senior officials.*"

The case, indicating that government corruption was already rife in those days, explains one reason why the Ministry of Public Work's approval of the project was delayed three years until 1894. Another reason was the give-and-take between the authorities and the company over the details of the original proposal. The original plans submitted by the company with its petition shows lines "extending to the outskirts of the city," as *Al-Ahram* said. Today's reader would be surprised at how extensive this really was. The line was to begin at Fumm Al-Khalig and extend northward until it passed Qasr Al-Nil bridge and then proceed northeastwards toward Faggala and Abbasiya. The designs included four branch lines: one to Boulaq and



Abul-Ela bridge, a second from Kubri Al-Limon to Shubra, a third from Kubri Al-Limon passing along Sabtiya Street to Boulaq and lastly a line from Qasr Al-Nil bridge to Giza.

Over the next two years we follow the haggling process in *Al-Ahram*. One item announces that the Council of Ministers would ratify the Cairo Tramway Company's proposed plans, with the stipulation that it add a fifth line from Abdel-Aziz Street to Mobtadiyan School in Al-Nasriya. A second item tells us that the company wanted to abandon the Shubra line because circumventing the railway bridge would have made it too costly. *Al-Ahram* pleaded that the company should strive to overcome this obstacle, *regardless of the costs. "Shubra is a* major segment of this city. It contains nearly a thousand students, whose trip back and forth should generate sufficient passenger volume for the tramway, in addition to the many other passengers who would travel back and forth from that district."

Finally, in November 1894, the Council of Ministers approved granting the concession to the company. The final plans provided for eight lines, most of which started from Ataba. The most important was the line extending toward Fumm Al-Khalig, passing over Roda and carried over the river by ferry *to* Giza. The council *stipulated* that work was to commence within nine months of ratification and be completed in less than two years, that the trains operating on the line would be powered by electricity and that the concession would terminate after five years.

Al-Ahram welcomed the news, with one reservation. "The government is binding itself to contracts from which it will not be able to extract itself until a certain period of time has lapsed. We must learn from our mistakes in the past so that we do not have to address the same mistakes in the future. Everyone who is sincerely committed to progress must do so." Perhaps *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Cairo who wrote this article had in mind the Suez Canal concession which was for a 99 year duration.

As for the reaction of the public, there is no better contemporary testimony than that of the historian Mikhail Sharobim, who recorded his impressions of the event in the fifth volume of his as yet unpublished book, *Al-Kafi fi Tarikh Misr* (The Comprehensive Egyptian History). "When the news spread among the people, they received it with surprise and confusion. How could the carriages run on electricity and on those new iron *rails? How will passengers be sure that they* are safe from the dangers of electricity? People would tell others what harm electricity can do to human beings and animals. Their accounts were strictly from their imagination and had no bearing on reality and no basis in science. When they uttered the word electric*ity, they would append to it foul curses and* profanities and add, "By God, it's one of those things those damned foreigners made!"

Undoubtedly to quell popular apprehensions, *Al-Hilal* magazine published a lengthy article entitled, "Cairo's Tramway" in which it explained how the new conveyance would operate. "Cairo's tramway consists of a large battery located in the company's headquarters. One pole is connected to the rails and another to the overhead cables. As the two poles never meet at either end, the circuit is incomplete. It would, therefore, be impossible for a person to come to harm, unless he stood on the rail and reached up to touch the overhead cable with an iron rod. Then he would receive an electric shock that would kill him instantly, because the electric current would run through him." The magazine further assures its readers that even if the overhead cable fell on a pedestrian, it wouldn't kill him, unless the aforementioned conditions existed.

The new project met with further scepticism, if not outright opposition. The most stung were the cart and animal drivers who still provided most of the transportation services in the city. Again, Mikhail Sharobim offers the most immediate portrayal of their discontent. "The Tramway Company built a factory and an enormous steam-operated electricity generator, overlooking the Boulaq Bridge. They set about work laying the rails with such intensity that their tools and equipment block the roads and obstruct pedestrians almost every day. The common people and the cart and donkey drivers deride this great work in progress and ridicule the foreign workers with silly jokes and wisecracks as if those workers were the actual owners of the project. It so happened that one day I was walking along Al-Manakh Street when I saw a group of donkey drivers clustered around some of those workers, taunting them and jeering at their hats and chanting jingles like 'Electricity, electricity, God curse Belgianisity. Electricity, electricity, soon it'll kill a thousand and fifty.' People would gather around them and laugh along and say, 'Yes, by God, damn the Belgians,' and all this time not one of those workers uttered a sound. They just carried on unruffled, and thoroughly absorbed in their work.'

One detractor argued that the tramway would be an economic burden to an agricultural country such as Egypt. In an article entitled: "The Tramway and the Veneer of Progress," Dr. Saleh Bek Sobhi wrote, "Egypt is an agricultural country. It would, therefore, be better if the tramway were pulled by mules or horses which are no great expense and which would also bring some benefit to farmers and livestock breeders. Electricity, on the other hand, swallows up people's money for nothing in return, since the electricity generators all *have to* be imported from Europe."

The tramway did have its supporters. Most of these were well-educated individuals who saw the tramway as a sign of modernisation. Perhaps *Al-Ahram*'s Cairo correspondent typified their viewpoint when he wrote on 23 *July 1896, "The worst harm* tramways can bring is that they would put some donkey and cart drivers and coachmen out of work, but they could always find some other profitable employment." On the plus side, he argued, the tramway is "a comfortable, speedy and inexpensive mode of transportation, *which* enables us *not to waste pre*cious time in this day and age." Moreover, an efficient and regular means of transportation would come as a boon to residents in the suburbs, who find rents in the city "too expensive to bear". The tramway also might contribute to lowering rents and it would bring the burgeoning edges of the city closer together. Nevertheless, the writer did add the reservation, "The effects will be proven through experience."

From the day of its trial run, we begin to follow the progress of the electric tramway in *Al-Ahram*. At 7pm that day, following the inauguration celebrations, the tramway opened its services to the public. It began with two lines, one from Boulaq to Abul-Ela and the other from Ataba to Bab Al-Khalq. The company posted the prices in the newspaper. Travel on the new tramway cost "three milliemes per stop for first class and two milliemes per stop for second class, with a minimum payment of two stations, so that the minimum fare passengers must pay is six milliemes for first class and four milliemes for second class." It also established the principle that remains with us to this day of offering reduced fares for the military, who would pay "two and a half milliemes for three stops or less and four milliemes for four stops in second class and four milliemes from one to four stops in first class."

From the outset, it appears, the tramway faced some tough criticism. Passengers who had been to Europe complained that the Belgian company was using carriages that were no longer used in the European capitals because they were too heavy and too dangerous. "Why don't we have the up-to-date models that one sees in Paris, Berlin and Budapest, since these do not have all those cables in the air suspended from poles," they grumbled. Frequent too were complaints that the trains were "intolerably" late, that they took on passengers that far exceeded capacity and that the conductors invariably lacked enough small change. *Al-Ahram* also took it upon itself to remind the company of its social responsibilities. It should offer employment to the poor, and particularly those cart and donkey drivers the tramways put out of work, in those jobs that do not require technical expertise and that had been monopolised by foreigners.

But one could hardly imagine worse press than those unfortunate tramway accidents blazoned in the newspaper and that occurred virtually once a month on average. In September 1896 a child was struck down and killed on Mohamed Ali Street. In October, a tram ran over a foreigner who had slipped on the tracks. The following month two major accidents occurred. "A beggar was knocked down on Mohamed Ali Street, sustaining serious injuries that put him at the risk of death," was one. The second was when the tramway knocked down a mounted soldier, killing both him and the horse instantly. December seems to have passed without incident, but in January of the new year, the tramway struck down a young girl, killing her instantly, and in February another ran over a British soldier, "horrendously crush*ing one of his legs*". These accidents, according to *Al-Ahram*, were due to the pedestrians' carelessness, "as though these streetcars were carts".

Still *Al-Ahram* notes "the rush of people of all stations to ride the tramways day and night." This testimony to the popularity of *the new mode of transport is corroborated* by the fact that the Egyptian Tramway Company, in response to popular demand in Alexandria, succeeded in obtaining government approval for a similar system in that city. Alexandria's new system was inaugurated by the Khedive personally on 11 September 1898; further proof that Egypt had entered the age of the "electric-powered tramway."

The author is a renowned historian and a professor of modern history at Ain Shams University.

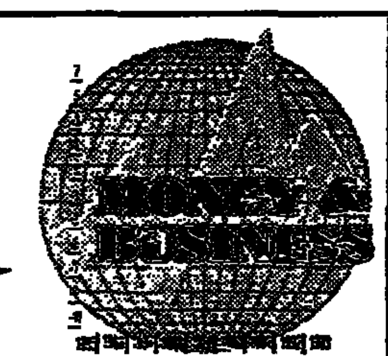


Promotions in the Ministry of Economy

PRIME Minister Atef Sidki appointed 62 general managers in financing and accounting positions in the Sales Tax Department. Among the appointees are Ibrahim El-Sirri, Sabra Sadiq, Mohamed El-Maghazi, Said El-Guindi, Mustafa Abu Yazid, Ramadan Mubarak, Insaf Sulayman, Nadia Mohamed, Fathia Dessouqi and Samir El-Sharqawi.

In addition, Mahmoud Mohamed Mahmoud, the minister of economy and foreign trade, appointed Ahmed Abu El-Fath Ismail, head of the production sector at El-Chark Insurance, to membership on the company's board of directors.





More garbage collecting companies

OMAR Abdel Akher, governor of Cairo, has decided to launch extra garbage collecting companies in an effort to improve sanitation throughout Cairo. A plan to collect the extra garbage in the Sheraton Housing area was set in Abdel Akher's *meeting with his deputies which* was attended by Yehia El-Said, first undersecretary of the Ministry of Housing. Abdel Akher said that the agreement to boost cleaning projects in Cairo was made with Atef Ubeid, minister of administrative reform and environment.

Mutual fund offers investment opportunities

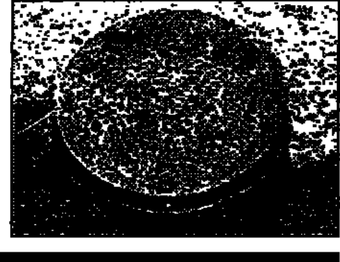
SINCE Banque du Caire began offering subscriptions at the end of last week for the bank's first mutual fund, subscription figures reveal the confidence investors have for subscribing to stocks of mutual funds. Officials at Banque du Caire have reported that the bank's mutual fund is still receiving an influx of subscription funds, exceeding all expectations and estimations, from domestic branches, as well as foreign branches located in the Gulf, especially the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Banque du Caire has stood alone in showing special concern for overcoming all obstacles which subscribers in these branches face, whether they are foreign businessmen or Egyptians living in the Gulf, and offering new incentives conveyed by Banque du Caire *mutual funds. Banque du Caire is an exemplary bank with a* strong reputation and international expertise in managing mutual funds, with the fewest administrative burdens in comparison to similar mutual funds currently available in the Egyptian market. This is reflected in the value of the investment bonds of the fund, which the bank boosts by offering liquidation of up to 25 per cent of their face value, which guarantees the bank's investment and prevents their liquidation at a lower rate. The bank has acquired many excellent stocks from its overflowing investment portfolios, and is participating in the privitisation process in order to realise its plans.



Above: one of the objects raised from the site, thought to be a pulley sheave and, below, a number of porcelain plates

Shipwreck

The wreck of a porcelain carrying ship in the Red Sea, thought to be a 17th century vessel, was partially excavated this summer. The first season's findings have now been made public, as Hala Halim reports



The decision to excavate the site of a 17th century shipwreck, located at a depth of around 35 to 45 metres between offshore coral reefs and Sadana Island, south of Hurgada, was made in 1994. The Sadana Island shipwreck excavation, as it is known, is directed by Cheryl Haldane of the Institute of Nautical Archaeology-Egypt (INA-Egypt), and includes INA members, archaeologists from the Supreme Council for Antiquities (SCA) and representatives from the Egyptian navy. In two public lectures, Douglas Haldane, director of INA-Egypt and field director of the excavation, outlined progress already made.

An INA survey of submerged sites along the Red Sea coast from Qussair Al-Qadim to Ras Mohamed at the tip of Sinai in the summer of 1994 revealed that the hull conformed neither to European nor Arab construction, thus warranting further study. "The wreck also represented a rich source of information about Red Sea trade in the 17th century," commented Haldane. This information could have been lost had excavation not been attempted, because looters had left disquieting traces at the site, such as a number of recently broken and discarded porcelain objects.

Among the objectives the team set itself this season, from mid-June to the end of August 1995, was to map and survey the wreck (about 50 metres in length by 25 metres in width), prepare it for future study and raise as much of the ship's cargo as possible. The plethora of objects found within and around the wreck included glass objects, copper utensils, *zillas* (large storage jars), *kullal* (small jugs) and porcelain artefacts. Three hundred porcelain objects have been found, Haldane said, all raised at the end of the season. It was this porcelain cargo that yielded invaluable evidence regarding the dating and destination of the ship.

It included a number of wares in "Chinese Imari" style, described as "a polychrome imitation of Japanese-style decoration", involving a blue underglaze and an overglaze in a variety of colours. Given the hostile sea environment, most of this Imari ware had lost its overglaze with the exception of one bowl, which was found to be almost identical to another of the same type in the Topkapi Saray Museum in Turkey. The latter, added Haldane, dates to the early 18th century, which might date the ship later than originally speculated. On the other hand, he said, a number of the other porcelain objects are more typical of the mid-17th century. This conflicting evidence on the dating of the ship has yet to be resolved.

A number of dishes, plates and bowls, decorated with a peony pattern, provided the archaeologists with a basis for their theories regarding the destination of the ship's cargo. These, and other porcelain objects on the site, were notable for the absence of human or animal motifs. European porcelain-carrying ships salvaged in the Pacific Ocean have revealed porcelain decorated with human motifs. The Sadana Island porcelain was exclusively decorated in floral designs, which, Haldane suggests, probably means the cargo was destined for an Islamic market.

The ship's cargo also included coconuts, aromatic resin, pepper, coriander and coffee — substances originally preserved in containers, and extracted with the use of sieves from the sediment that had accrued around them. Yemen had become a leading producer of coffee by the end of the 17th century, and the commodity was exported to world markets through the Red Sea, then across the desert to Alexandria and re-exported from there. As for the resins, the archaeologists intend to analyse them chemically as this would possibly allow for identification of the plants which produced them, and hence, their country of origin.

The preliminary survey of the hull this season reconfirmed the question the archeologists had posed when the wreck was first located — namely, the unknown construction design of the hull. For a closer examination, trenches were dug and sand removed with the use of hydrolifts. It became apparent that the composite frames (made of two layers of wood) are unusually far apart, in contrast to those of Dutch ships. A number of samples of wood and bark were removed as identification of the wood would be indicative of the ship's region of origin. The archaeologists hope that future seasons of excavation will yield more concrete evidence as to the method of construction.

But what of the shipwrecked crew? Whence did they come and what befell them? "The only personal items found were a number of pipes and charcoal holders for water pipes," said Haldane. Their last hours are all too easy to visualise. "We assume there was a storm, the ship would have hit against the reef... Even if [a crew member] crossed the reef, the nearest town at the time was Qussair — 150 kilometres through the desert to the south." So far, no human remains have been found, but this is not unusual for a shipwreck. "Generally [bodies] dissolve in sea water, and also when people drown their bodies swell... and they can end up elsewhere. The cases where human remains were found were mostly in fresh water or very cold water", Haldane explained.

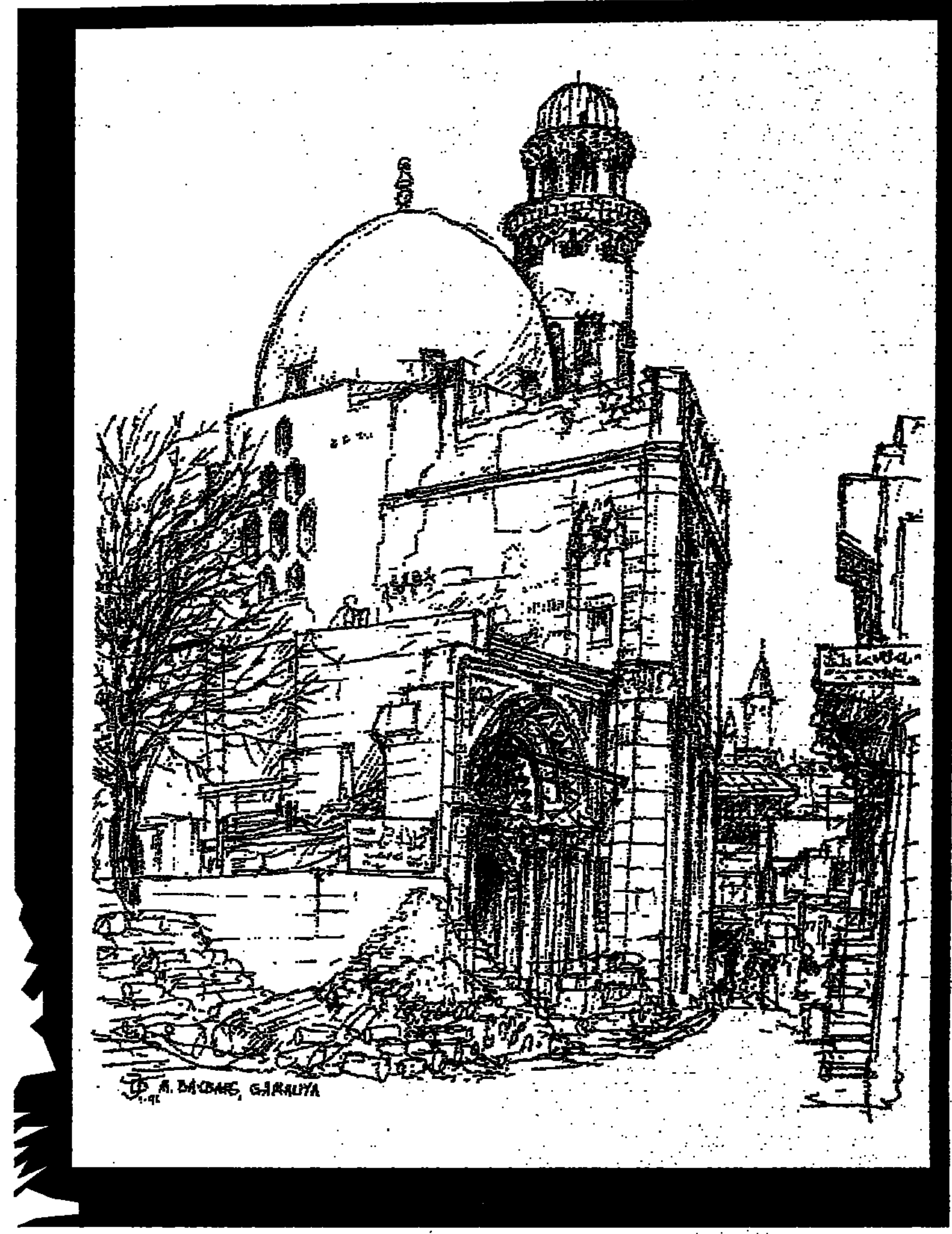
At the close of this first phase of excavation, artefacts were given preliminary treatment at the site to ensure their safe transport to Alexandria. Transporting the objects was an elaborate procedure. The waterlogged artefacts, painstakingly packed in the back of a truck, were accompanied by armed guards for the 14-hour drive.

With one exception, the objects all arrived safely. They are currently being desalinated and restored at the Maritime Museum in Stanley Bay, Alexandria. The SCA has recently agreed to the INA using five empty buildings located on the grounds of the Maritime Museum, according to the INA's deputy director, Emad Khalil. The buildings, he explained, are in the process of being turned into conservation laboratories for the treatment of antiquities salvaged from the sea in the course of INA excavations.

The excavation is to resume next summer, with a bigger team of divers who will focus on the deeper parts of the site, and investigate the hull more closely. Meanwhile, in the absence of adequate protection of this and other Red Sea sites, looting remains an ever-present threat.

Complementary lines

Still feeding the poor



Jarostaw Dobrowolski's sketch of a Sufi monastery is complemented by **Helen Miles'** description

It takes a leap of the imagination to remember that the *khanqah* (Sufi residence) of Sultan Beybars sketched here has long past its 600th birthday. The commodious monastery built in Cairo to house 400 followers of the faith plus another 100 soldiers and off-spring of the Mamlukes, is still bristling with activity.

During Ramadan, a vaulted chamber off the courtyard was turned into a soup kitchen. In the final hour approaching *iftar*, a steady stream of people came in with tureens which were filled with dollops of steaming food. A cluster of would-be sages discussed the day's affairs on wooden chairs, children played on the paving stones, and a solitary worshipper prostrated himself in a raised sanctuary at the far end.

The monastery, built in 1310, is the oldest of its kind in Cairo. The Sufi's cells are ranged on two sides of the open square whose walls are punctuated by low wooden doors and honeycomb decorated windows, but it now feels more like a place to transact business than to come for spiritual sustenance.

It stands on the site of a former Fatimid palace, and was built with no expense spared. However, after lavishing money on the structure, Beybars II came to a grisly end — strangled under the orders of Nasir Mohamed, his arch rival, whom Beybars had managed to depose.

Down the centuries, the building won the admiration of visitors for its costly decoration. The 15th century historian Al-Maqrizi described it as: "the most magnificent monument in Cairo, the largest and most solidly constructed." The building includes a marble panelled tomb chamber, a striking canopied doorway and a minaret enlivened with rare green tiling. Another of the building's claims to fame is that the great medieval historian and traveller, Ibn Khaldoun, acted as its director for several years towards the end of the 14th century.

Its quirky features include a Pharaonic portal stone, purportedly placed there so that believers could tread on the inscribed names of the heathen gods as they entered, and a stone plaque outside the doorway which once contained Beybars titles which were erased by his victor.

The monastery is to be found on a side street leading to the right off Muizz Liddin Allah Street in Islamic Cairo. Walk past the Bayt Al-Sihaymi, and Beybars building will be in front of you when you hit a T-junction.



November quiz!

Here is our second question for November :

The Monastery of St Catherine in Sinai is situated deep in the heart of the mountains. To what Christian denomination does it belong?

We are waiting for your answers for October. Deadline 15 November. Don't miss our prizes.

Name...
Address...
Tel. No. (if available)..
Answer to Question 1, issue 245
Answer to Question 2, issue 246
Answer to Question 3, issue 247
Answer to Question 4, issue 248

Post your entry to
Travel Quiz
Al-Ahram Weekly, Al-Ahram, 9th Floor,
Sharia Al-Galaa, Cairo.

Preserving the heritage

Talented young people are contributing to the restoration of Egypt's monuments, through the work of an institute dedicated to passing craft skills on to the next generation. Nevine El-Aref reports

A rising generation of skilled craftsmen in action — photo: Mohamed Wassem

Opened in 1966 to teach traditional craft skills to young people, the Archaelogical Crafts Institute in Sayeda Zeinab has since developed to play a valuable role in the restoration of Egypt's monuments.

According to its director Abdel-Mohsen Atteya, "The institute has contributed to the restoration of the *minbar* (pulpit) of the Mohamed Ali Mosque, *mashrabiya* windows at the Islamic Museum, copper and wooden items in Beit Al-Harawi in Al-Batniya, as well as parts of the Coptic Museum, the Hanging Church, Abu Sarga Church and the Church of the Virgin Mary in Zuweila Street."

This is an impressive record for an institute whose initial aim did not extend beyond keeping traditional crafts alive. Concerned that expertise was not being passed on to the next generation, the institute decided to recruit boys at least 12 years old, who showed some artistic promise and a certain level of intelligence, and enrol them for a three-year training course during which they would be taught skills including appliqué work (*khayamiya*), *mashrabiya*, copper engraving, Islamic woodwork and carpet weaving.

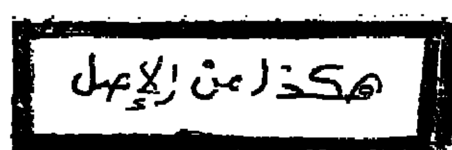
During training, students receive a daily allowance of between LE3 and LE5. Once a student has reached a certain level of skill, he can, if he chooses, continue to work at the institute for a wage of up to LE8 a day, Abdel-Mohsen said.

Students' training, he explained, is divided into three stages. The pupil is first introduced to the tools of his new trade and how to use them. Then he will begin practising within the institute, and finally, if he has the talent, a student will be allowed to share in the restoration of damaged artifacts or monuments.

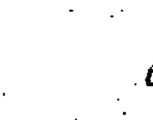
Within a year of its foundation, the institute became an important source of skilled craftsmen, and now provides the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) with an important flow of talent which has been employed in the restoration of Cairo's Coptic and Islamic buildings.

The institute's fame has spread, and students are now in demand further afield. "We have also contributed to the restoration of Islamic monuments in Rashid (Rosetta) where we have now opened a second branch," said Abdel-Mohsen, "and we hope shortly to open a third in Upper Egypt."

Proper recognition of the craftsmen's work should be reflected in an increase in pay, Abdel-Mohsen believes. "I feel it is important to increase their wages to encourage them to continue their work," he said. And he is keen to keep the people he has trained within the institute: "We don't want them to leave for higher wages or to start private businesses."







The best and the rest

Ball-slapping was the name of the game, and Egypt did more than hold its own in the speedball championship. **Eric Asomugha** reports

Before a capacity crowd of cheering fans, former national speedball champion Mustafa Kamel brought the super solo speedball title back to Egypt.

For six long years the cup had rested on French soil after it was taken away from Hussein Lutfi in 1989, but in the 10th World Speedball Championship, held last week in Al-Ahly Indoor Sports Hall, the tides changed as Kamel dazzled the crowds with powerful swings, racking up 531 points and knocking the former title holder, David Cuzel of France off his throne.

According to Mohamed Lutfi, president of the Egyptian Speedball Federation, this was a win for all. All, that is, except for Cuzel who offered this pearl of wisdom in explanation for his loss, "That's sports; there's always a winner and a loser. But I hope to work harder next year and win back the title."

But if Egyptian national coach, Mohamed Amin has anything to do with it, that prediction will remain a far-fetched dream. "It (the title) has come to stay and we're not losing it to any country again."

The return of the title also seems to be the product of enticing incentives offered by Mohamed Lutfi, as well as hard work and determination. In 1993, Lutfi attempted to raise the stakes and lure new players by donating a new trophy and offering a cash prize of LE1,000 for the solo championship. And while Cuzel's record of 532 points still stands, this win signals a comeback for Egyptian speedballers.

"This is the best championship ever for Egypt. We won the solo and the rest of the games in two straight sets" said Amin. "It stands as irrefutable evidence of how hard we worked to prepare for the championship."

With the exception of the mixed doubles match, Egypt's players had the Midas touch. They collected all the gold medals in the junior and senior events. Neir Dawa, a former solo champion, outplayed his French opponent in the singles match, snatching both sets in 10-4, 10-5. His confidence was clear as he played an error-free game where he capitalised on his height by frequently throwing in a series of high volleys and powerful returns. As an accountant at the Egyptian American Bank, Dawa notes that he has little time to train. But whatever shortcomings this may produce are compensated for by moral support and enthusiasm on the part of his co-workers. "This," he said, "is the secret of my success."

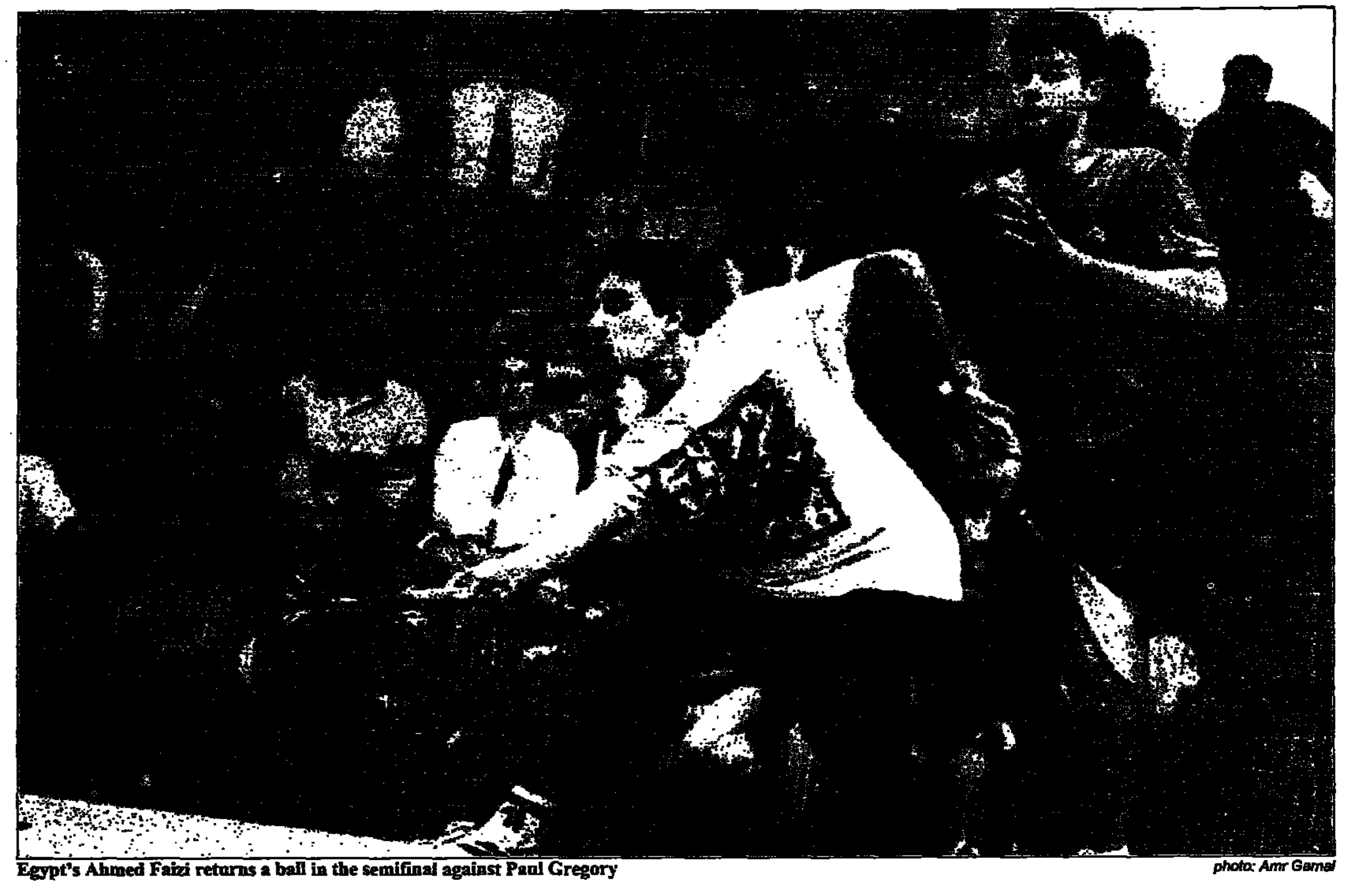
In the men's doubles, the team of Ahmed Sherif and Ashraf Fawzy taught their French opponents a couple of new tricks while defeating them 10-7, 10-9.

The game, however, was not to be dominated by the men. Omayma Abdel-Hamid was at her best, smashing 475 points to set a new record, despite having the string break twice during her volleys. Radwa Sharqawi, a former world solo champion, had another taste of success, taking the singles title.

With Egypt and France vying for the gold, Austria and Nigeria were left to scramble for sloppy second in a heated competition. Although the Nigerian team boasted a line-up of powerful players, they were not able to subdue the agile Austrians. "Having played a match yesterday, we were tired, and my teammate played with an injured hand," said Nigeria's Yinka Alam. "The Austrians had an advantage because they had more players participating." As a result, the Austrians collected most of the remaining medals in the solo, singles and doubles matches.

World singles champion, Neir Dawa

For many up-and-comers, the championship was the place to see and be seen. Slovenia's players improved on their past performances, with Robert Hafner emerging as a strong contender in coming competitions. In what could have been an upset for Austria and Nigeria, Hafner defeated Shaban Redepy of Bosnia in two straight sets, but lost to Nigeria. "It was a good championship marred only by our loss to Nigeria," said Gregor Pecovnik, Hafner's doubles partner.



Egypt's Ahmed Faizi returns a ball in the semifinal against Paul Gregory

photo: Amr Gamal

Open and squash case

Fast-paced action, a collection of pros and some bloodshed made the Heliopolis Squash Open the place to be. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports

The smattering of 150 spectators became a cheering throng of 1,000 fans once the Heliopolis Squash Open moved to Cairo Stadium's squash courts for the semifinals and finals. And the competition was no less intense.

While fans cheered Ahmed Faizi and Amir Wagih's move to the semifinals, they expressed disappointment at Ahmed Barada's absence from the competition. Barada, who sustained neck and shoulder injuries after the US Open, is resting before the World Teams Championship which will be held in Cairo from 13-24 November. He will also miss the World Individual Championship in Cyprus, which is currently being held in Cyprus until 12 November.

Faizi, who is ranked 61 in the world, went head-to-head in the semifinals with Paul Gregory, ranked 21 in the world and first-seeded in the tournament. Although Faizi did his best, he was not able to keep up with Gregory's seemingly unending well of stamina, and lost 3-2. "He was a great player; much tougher than I expected considering he's 17 years-old," said Gregory.

Faizy, however, was disappointed with his performance. "I should have been more confident and focused," he said. "When my score is low, I tend to give up too easily."

In the same court where Faizi and Gregory held their show-down, Wagih, ranked 25 in the world and third-seeded in the tournament, tested his skills against Craic Rowland, ranked 24 in the world and second-seeded in the tournament.

With Barada absent, Egyptian squash fans hoped that Wagih would find it in himself to be the first Egyptian to win the Heliopolis Open, but his 3-2 loss to Rowland proved otherwise. Wagih, however, had to not only contend with a tough competitor, but also a bloody nose and a biased British referee. A tough day all round.

But while Wagih was wiping his nose, Rowland was busy dispatching Gregory 3-2 in the finals.

The women may not have resulted in any hemorrhaging, but it was, nonetheless, exciting. World Champion Michelle Martin and Liz Irving, ranked third in the world, dazzled the crowd with their strength and speed, while encouraging other pros to enter the competition.

The tournament was also a prime opportunity for juniors like Eman El-Amir and Rasha Hegazi to test their skill against the pros. For Salma Shabana, ranked 29 in the world, and 39th ranked Maha Zein, it was a chance to move up in standings in preparation for the World Individual Championships in Cyprus.

Both Shabana and Zein made it to the quarterfinals though neither has much experience in professional competitions. The inexperience was evident in the case of Zein who was brushed aside by 12th ranked Vicki Cardwell. Even at 40 years old, Cardwell showed no signs of losing any of her speed and stamina. Shabana put up a better fight against Irving, but still lost 3-1. Martin defeated Rachel Grinbam 3-0 in the finals.

On the last day of the competition, the Egyptian Squash Federation (ESF) held a press conference to announce the final arrangements for the World Teams Championship in Cairo.

ESF officials have apparently gotten their act together and overcome the budget and coaching problems they had faced over the last three months which threatened to disrupt the competition.

The championship will draw teams from 32 countries including first-ranked Australia. Egypt is ranked sixth in the world. The countries have been divided into eight pools, playing in a round-robin system.

Snookered and subdued

Shepherds' pie and fish and chips replace *foul* and *falafel* as the official food of the World Snooker Championship after the tournament is moved from Cairo to London

Excitement over the International Amateur Snooker Federation's (IASF) approval for Egypt to host the World Snooker Championship fizzled as the IASF went back on its word on 24 August, just five days after the confirmation was received by Egyptian officials.

While Egypt had secured the necessary financing to stage the tournament from 10-25 November, the IASF sent a fax to the Egyptian Billiards Federation (EBF) secretary, Farouq El-Barki, stating that the International Professional Snooker Federation (IPSF) had been selected to sponsor the tournament in London. No explanation for the change of heart was offered.

"We could have organised the championship if only we were given the opportunity," said El-Barki. To add insult to injury, he added, the IPSF has no experience organising the World Amateur Championship and did not make a better offer than Egypt.

Other member nations of the IASF had been reluctant to hold the tournament due to the expense to be incurred. Host countries are responsible for organisational costs plus allowances for the participants and delegates from guest countries.

"Compared to the World Amateur French Billiards Championship, which usually costs the organisers LE150,000, the snooker championship would have cost between LE700,000-800,000," said El-Barki. "Egypt, however, was the only country that bid to host the 1995 World Championship during the general assembly of the IASF in Johannesburg in 1994."

In an attempt to defray the costs, the EBF had succeeded in gaining approval to have the new measures to be implemented by the IASF in 1996 apply to the 1995 championship. These new measures hold the host country responsible for half the participants' accommodation costs in 1996 and made the delegations and participants responsible for the full accommodation costs in 1997.

When El-Barki received confirmation by fax that Egypt would hold the championship, he proceeded with his plans and set the closing date for entries at 5 September. The IASF also offered to assist Egypt with the costs by reducing the tournament's expenses to LE300,000. The Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS) agreed to provide LE100,000 and the remaining sum was promised by various sponsors. It seemed that everything was moving smoothly.

The efforts, however, came to no avail, and the championship was moved to England. EBF officials are still searching for an explanation.

EM

Steeeriike!

THE POLYESTER shirts with obnoxious logos were thankfully missing during last Sunday's Hong Kong International Lawn Bowls Classic pairs competition, as Scotland, for a record fourth year, captured the title. The team of Alex Marshall and Kenny Logan edged past South Africa's Neil Burkett and Donny Piketh, 19-18.

Double dribble quibble

AFTER much controversy, the recent decree passed by the Egyptian Basketball Federation (EBF) concerning the transfer of players from one club to another, was suspended by the Sports Body.

Sports Body officials stated that as the decree carries serious implications for the future of the game in Egypt, the EBF should have presented it first to the General Committee where it would have been voted on before being passed on to the clubs.

Olympic onus

A PUBLIC oversight board is stepping up its scrutiny of the budget for the 1996 Olympics now that an accountant has expressed concern over the organisers' chances of breaking even.

George Berry, chairman of the Metropolitan Atlanta Olympic Games Authority (MAOGA), said the panel would begin monthly reviews of the $1.61 billion Olympic budget rather than the quarterly examinations.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Tarek El-Bishri: A socialist Islam?

In the eye of a storm of controversy, he has kept his distance, while keeping open the line of dialogue. At the heart of the legislative process, he has maintained historical vision. From law to history and back again: the movement circumscribes the full circle of his allegiance

The small, dimly-lit library in Tarek El-Bishri's home is but part of a greater extension. When the books began to overflow, they were relegated to storage in the apartment in Giza, where he and his wife, Aida, first lived when they married. They were relegated, but never renounced, because for El-Bishri, thought has been the widening of circles of awareness, rather than a refutation of ideas.

He pulls a small, thick volume off the shelf: the *History of Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, translated by Mohamed Qasem and Hussein Hosni. The nostalgia is visible: "I found it in Azbakiya [the second-hand book market] in the seventies. It was our history book at school. This is the 1922 edition. It fascinates me to think that generations grew up with that book. We read it with an almost Sufi liberalist enthusiasm: Mazzini, Garibaldi, the French revolution..." He stops. His quiet courteousness is a buffer against the argumentative; but because of his warmth, it is never inhibiting.

The fact that he is an eminent historian and a highly respected judge is not what singles out El-Bishri. It is, paradoxically, that he — an Islamist — has reaped the most praise from those on the other side of the fence: secularist and left-wing intellectuals. The Marxist critic Mahmoud Amin El-Alim sees in El-Bishri's progression from a secular socialist to an Islamist orientation "part of the crisis of Arab intellectuals after 1967. Nevertheless, among them, El-Bishri comes forth as one of the most rational and objective... who has distanced himself from demagoguery and intolerance. He is profound in the intellectual constants, which he has developed, whether we agree with them or not. Because of his respect for the other side, conducting dialogue with him becomes a question of honour and seriousness." The respect and appreciation El-Bishri inspires are not purely intellectual dispositions, though. There is a general perception that, on the level of human relationships, he has an almost phenomenal capacity to interact with others, bridging intellectual discrepancies, differences in age and in profession.

In 1980, at a seminar on 'Arabism and Islam' El-Bishri made his Islamic tendency clear, and immediately "felt that many there reacted to me differently. I went later to all of my acquaintances, one by one, and explained that the change in my intellectual position did not mean I had changed as a person. Some understood, others did not."

From above the shelves, a turn-of-the-century photograph of Tarek's grandfather, Sheikh Selim El-Bishri, Sheikh of Al-Azhar, gazes down with a vividness that breaks through the faded sepia tones. Were El-Bishri's Azharite roots responsible for his ultimate Islamic orientation? "I would agree, if that means social roots and not purely personal circumstances... Islam is too basic a phenomenon to search here for purely personal reasons."

As a judge, El-Bishri has made significant contributions to the development of a contextual approach to the interpretation of Islamic law. His work, as deputy head of the State Council (Majlis Al-Dawla) is largely practical, but he has focused on the methodological aspects of dealing with legal texts in their association with one another, as well as the historical dimensions of each text. He sees the evolution of a legal-philosophical frame of reference for Islamic law, as opposed to the secular frame of reference from which positive law is derived, as part of "the efforts of Egyptian legislators over the past one hundred years to achieve legislative independence from France. This was the concern of Abdel-Raziq El-Sanhouri, a judge with historic vision, when he formulated the new Civil Law in 1949, and when he formulated the new Iraqi law, drawing largely upon *Shari'a*."

As a historian, El-Bishri moved from a Marxist/nationalist perspective to what he calls the "Islamic" interpretation of history — where doctrinal and spiritual autonomy is a prerequisite for independence. Placing value on his own secularist formation, and on political pluralism, he calls for "dialogue, between the secular and pan-Arab trends, on the one hand, and the political Islamist trend on the other" in order to decrease the alienation which has beset their mutual understanding. His works have been scarce, but are considered landmarks. The titles include, *Democracy and the Regime of the 23 July Revolution; Between Islam and Arabism, Muslims and Copts in the Framework of National Unity; The Political Movement in Egypt 1945-1952*, and *A Methodology for the Study of Contemporary Governing Systems in the Islamic Countries* ("Manhaj Al-Nazar fi Nuzum Al-Hukm Al-Mu'asira fi'l-Bildan Al-Islamiya").



photos: Sherif Sonbol

In his authoritative work *Muslims and Copts in the Framework of National Unity* (Al-Jama'a Al-Wataniya), he outlines the principles of political participation within the framework of Islamic political and legal thought. The book was published in 1981, and then removed from the market. It was turned over to a joint Muslim-Copt committee for review, then re-launched. Other than minor books dealing with the issue in the early fifties, by Jacques Tager and Zogheib Mikhail, the book was the first to deal with Muslim-Coptic relations in the modern political context. According to Anouar Abdel-Malik, "El-Bishri's book, appearing at the beginning of the oil era... reinforcing the equity of Muslims and Copts, and their unity as Egyptians.. was the most potent response to the reactionary waves of the oil Bedouins."

The work spans the entry of Copts into modern institutions under Mohamed Ali, the doctrinal independence of the Coptic Church, its position on the question of Palestine, and the secular-nationalist formula of 1919, which resolved tension between Muslims and Copts "in the direction of equity rather than by dealing with Copts as a distinct minority". In the final chapter, El-Bishri expresses his "awareness of the secularists' trepidation versus the traditional concept of religious minorities, [which is] antithetical to the idea of modern citizenship and equity". In an effort at *ijtihad* (independent interpretation) based on *Al-Ahkam Al-Sultaniya*, the encyclopaedic work of jurisprudence by the Abbasid Al-Mawardi, he develops a formula for the full participation of religious minorities in the political process. The traditional Islamic concept of political authority evolves, giving Muslims and Copts equal status in legislation and decision-making.

Tarek El-Bishri was born on 1 November 1933, into a middle-class Cairene family. His grandfather, the ancestor on the wall, was Sheikh of Al-Azhar from 1900 to 1917. Expelled from office for four years, after a confrontation with the Khedive Abbas over British interference and involving Al-Azhar in the appointment of khedival aides, Selim returned to office. El-Bishri never saw his grandfather, but the story of Selim's expulsion endured, leaving him with "the fundamental feeling that social value is that of knowledge, and... autonomy from authority". He grew up "between the traditional turban worn by the Azharite sheikhs, and the *tarboush*, worn by the secular graduates of the modern schools" — nothing symbolic about the dichotomy. His father was a civil judge, his cousins all in the "modern professions". He saw social legitimacy transferred from one type of education to the other "the change in clothes, in habits... the nuances in the transition from one state of being to another." He grew up among "three generations: that of the turn of the century — some of my uncles were that old; the generation of 1919; and my own. I heard their stories and a memory was formed in me, extended, complex, as if I had lived in those eras."

El-Bishri graduated from law school in 1954. He studied under both civilian lawyers and Azharite sheikhs and was appointed to the State Council's agricultural department, affiliated with the revolution's agrarian reform programme. Extensive theoretical research was required in *Shari'a*, civil and administrative law. "The *awqaf* (pious endowments) had been taken apart and integrated in the agrarian reform programme, a situation which gave rise to highly technical *Shari'a* problems." Slowly, his interests developed, leading him from legal minutiae to the study of law from "the point of view of its historic dimension, and not simply its practical solutions".

The Tripartite Aggression of 1956 was a turning point. He turned to writing history, feeling that "the discipline of law was not enough to explain events external to the legal system. In history it was the intellectual, the political expression of society. It was the domain where, as a judge, I could participate without direct involvement and be free to develop and reformulate my ideas." In 1964, he began contributing historical articles to *Rose El-Youssef*, and the then just-established Marxist journals: *Al-Tali'a* and *Al-Katib*.

The Arab-Israeli war of 1967 was the second turning-point. He stopped writing then. "I needed a fundamental reformulation of the criteria I was using in judging historical events. What happened in my case happened to many people in the Arab world. After the defeat of 1967, I felt the issue was not capitalism versus socialism. There was a civilisational, a spiritual dimension lacking, the sense of independent identity which can make one act autonomously. Mention Arabism, socialism, the reaction was sceptical; but mention Islam, and people felt: here was a serious element."

In 1982, ten years after the first edition was published, El-Bishri published a second edition of *The Political Movement in Egypt 1945-1952*. The text remained unchanged, but the introduction was completely rewritten. "The facts, the basic analysis still stood; but I felt that I had to state that the criteria by which I had viewed the Muslim Brotherhood and their ideology had changed from a 'lack of sympathy' to an understanding of the context from within which they operated." He cites the "dynamic interaction of Islam with life in Egypt throughout the nineteenth century" as an illustration of this context. "It was not until the late nineteenth century that secularist institutions, judicial, educational and financial, affiliated to distinct foreign interests, took root in Egyptian soil, resulting in a dichotomy which lives with us today. It was not until after 1919 and the Wafd that political secularism became a legitimate part of nationalist thought. The secular interpretation of history asks: why did the Brotherhood involve religion in politics? But Islam as a spiritual, legal-social system was the reality for 14 centuries. The secular was the novel development. The question then is: why did Islam, as political, legal and institutional forms, become divorced from everyday life? This is the phenomenon that I believe requires study."

In his important work, *Manhaj Al-Nazar fi Nuzum Al-Hukm Al-Mu'asira fi'l-Bildan Al-Islamiya*, he develops his theory of the 'circles of allegiance', incorporating nationalist, pan-Arab, and ultimately Islamic affiliations. The ultimate allegiance is decided by one's position in history, and awareness of this position.

El-Bishri sees secularist fears of an Islamic theocracy as part of the battle which has pitted Islamists against secularists for the past ten years — symptomatic of "a confusion between two levels of debate. The dialogue going on now is about a frame of reference, not political systems. Unfortunately, things are not expressed in this manner. Islam does not posit a specific political system. *Shari'a* operates within a legal-philosophical frame of reference, through which the texts of laws are interpreted. Within this framework, different systems can develop according to circumstances, [just as] the secular frame of reference in the West found expression in political systems as varied as communism, capitalism and fascism."

As for independent interpretation: to put the issue as '*ijtihad* or not' in the absolute sense, to posit it around the Qur'anic penalties (*hudud*), or the *hijab*, "is to express it in a limited manner. It becomes a question of political strife. There is no doubt in my mind as to the technical possibilities related to Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence) in the modern age. The circles of *ijtihad* extend from the codification of *Shari'a* at the end of the nineteenth century and are still with us today, in post-graduate studies at the Faculty of Law and Al-Azhar, in comparative studies between *fiqh* and positive law, which have covered immense ground."

For El-Bishri, the distinction between thinker and judge has remained clear — perhaps not so for others. Criticism was levelled against him last year, on the occasion of a legal opinion signed by him and issued by a collective body of senior judges, who constitute the State Council's General Assembly of the Departments for Legal Opinion and Legislation (*Al-Jam'iya Al-'Amma li Qismay Al-Fatwa wa'l-Tashri'*). The opinion settled a dispute between the Ministry of Culture and Al-Azhar, in favour of the latter, giving it the right to censor material related to Islam, in books, media and the cinema. Two open letters (one in *Al-Ahram* and one in *Al-Musawwar*) were addressed to El-Bishri, expressing fears that the hegemony of one strain of thought would pose a threat to pluralism, by giving religious institutions authority over creativity. El-Bishri did not respond: as a judge, he is prohibited from discussing legal sentences publicly.

"But were I to respond now, on the personal level I would say that the problem is that people reacted to a legal opinion as though it were my intellectual view on a public matter. This was a legal opinion published by a collective body of 22 senior judges, in accordance with civil law. It was not the settling of an intellectual dispute about the hegemony of religion, but the organisation of institutional roles according to the constitution."

He has been described as utopian, but he is rooted in the problems of the middle class. As a judge, he never lets "intellectual fascination with an idea" make him forget the individuals involved in each case. And he does have enormous integrity. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of El-Bishri's personality is the fact that his shift from a Marxist to an Islamic persuasion had nothing to do with political or intellectual fads, with removing the socialist cap to don a turban when the tide changed. One feels that his change in orientation was thought through and through, deeply and perhaps sometimes painfully, every step of the way — that he chose Islam because, ultimately, he felt it was the people's choice. Personally, he is quiet, reserved: he deals with pressures at work in silence, "pulls down the screen," as Aida says. As a judge, he has remained aloof, never compromising on decisions which could have harmed him personally. The important sentence in 1992 on the unconstitutionality of referring civilians to military courts carried his signature.

His sons, Emad and Ziad, have been allowed to find their way. The elder has been appointed to the State Council, to become a judge, like his father. The younger studied engineering.

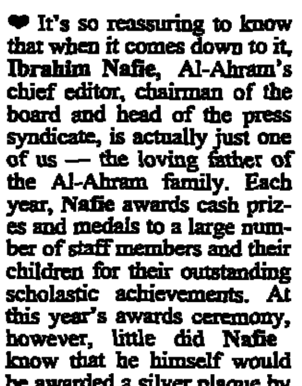
For El-Bishri, the dilemma of being judge and historian has been in the transition "from law to history, from the micro-level to the macro-level, like moving from one gradation of light to the other". But to the external world, his line of demarcation has been clear: as a judge, he has remained distant; as a thinker, he has maintained the line of dialogue. Self-consistency has been important. From law to history and back again: in the movement, he has circumscribed the full circle of his allegiance.

Profile by **Aziza Sami**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

❤ It's so reassuring to know that when it comes down to it, **Ibrahim Nafie**, Al-Ahram's chief editor, chairman of the board and head of the press syndicate, is actually just one of us — the loving father of the Al-Ahram family. Each year, Nafie awards cash prizes and medals to a large number of staff members and their children for their outstanding scholastic achievements. At this year's awards ceremony, however, little did Nafie know that he himself would be awarded a silver plaque by Al-Ahram's General Financial Manager **Hassan Halawi**, in his capacity as board chairman of the Workers' Fund, for his achievements in developing, expanding and modernising the organisation and its publications. With that little surprise over, Nafie proceeded to award over 410 individuals the astounding sum total of over LE68,000.



Nafie (left) — the best student of them all





Pottery as art: Mandour and his work



Salah Hafez

♦ Much to my dismay, I was unable to make it to England last week to hear *Al-Ahram*'s managing editor, **Salah Hafez**, give a lecture at the Middle East Studies Department of Oxford University's St Anthony's College. And from what I've been told, it was a lecture definitely worth hearing. Giving a historical analysis of the press in Egypt, Hafez spoke at length about the importance of, and challenges facing, journalism in Egypt, from the time it was first introduced in 1798 as part of the French expedition, and the subsequent appearance of the first censorship law. He concluded that the solution of current problems facing journalism in its conflict with the government depended mainly on the development of democracy in Egypt, stressing that the role of journalism goes as far as upholding democracy, eradicating illiteracy and reflecting social growth.

♠ Last Thursday night, I rubbed shoulders with over 700 guests, including cabinet ministers, Egyptian and American government officials and ambassadors galore to dine in style at the Binational Fulbright Commission's annual alumni dinner. Forty-six years after its inception, the commission is currently celebrating a long and fruitful history in the promotion of Egyptian-American educational and cultural exchanges, with over four thousand Egyptians and Americans taking part in its exchanges. Many of these alumni have gone beyond national renown to achieve international prominence, such as my good friends **Boutros Boutros Ghali**, secretary-general of the UN and **Fathi Sorour**, speaker of the People's Assembly. The dinner gave me a chance to see **Harriet Mayor Fulbright**, my wonderful friend and speaker at the dinner, once more, as well as the evening's co-hosts and honourary chairmen of the Commission's Board of Directors Minister of Education **Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin**, and US Ambassador **Edward Walker**.

♣ It should come as no surprise to you, dears, that I am an avid patron of the arts and do my best to help whenever and however I can. So imagine my delight in receiving an invitation to **Salwa El-Maghraby**'s Khan El-Maghraby Gallery where the very talented **Mohamed Mandour** was exhibiting a selection of his stunning pottery collection. The delicate pieces were a brilliant addition to the cosy gallery which, with its warm, earthy overtones, looks remarkably like my living room. It did my heart proud to watch **Mohamed** rub elbows with the créme de la créme of the foreign diplomatic community like **Brown Warington**, deputy administrative counselor at the US Embassy. I also caught a fleeting glimpse of **Hanan El-Shafi'e**, owner of the gorgeous boutique I frequent when in the mood for the sophisticated and the simply divine. I did, however, dedicate time to chat with my good friend at *Al-Ahram*, **Leila Hafez**. Another of my close friends, **Shaker Abdel-Latif**, manager of the Contemporary Theatre was browsing through the displays, no doubt looking to add to his collection of earthenware.

